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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE SEMBLANCE OF CYMBELINE

BY

CAMERON M. LAUX

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Semblance of 'Cymbeline' submitted by Cameron Laux in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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(Supervisor)
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Date: 3rd September 1987

Abstract

Cymbeline as self-conscious metadrama, viewed (with no sense of harmonic balance) from an analytical and theoretical attitude which does not lend itself to abstractions of this sort.

Acknowledgments

A number of people will see themselves in what follows (surely, they will think, an array of amusement park mirrors). My thanks to John Orrell, Shirley Neuman, Chris Gordon-Craig, Anne McWhir, Robert Wilson, James Black, Don Perkins, Pam Bentley, Brad Bucknell and Linda.

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PROLOGUE

I begin with The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances, in which Barbara Mowat links the apparent incongruities and dissonances of Cymbeline to the art historian Heinrich Wolfflin's modernist concept of "open form" or "adventitious" art.[1] By analogy, she says, Cymbeline is open form drama:

> The curve of expectation is broken, the senses are focused on the present, the making of a consistent, meaningful artwork is put largely in the hands of the audience: an interesting definition of "modern" art of all kinds, and of the structure of open form drama of all periods.[2]

What controls (circumscribes) a work of art: the artist (Aristotle), a transcendent absolute (Plato) or the medium of expression (Barthes, Derrida)? In cases like this one invariably quotes a little Sidney, though he maintains noncommittally that an artist creates both originals and copies ("he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth"). Modern and post-modern thought serve as an analogue: Eliot derived his poetics from the Metaphysicals; Hamlet pervades Ulysses and Shakespeare, Woolf; the work of Nabokov is strongly

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[1] Barbara Mowat, The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 97ff. The reference is from Wolfflin's Principles of Art History, trans. M. Hottinger (London: George Bell, 1932).

[2] Mowat, p. 101.

influenced by Shakespeare's play with meaning.[3] At the risk of oversimplifying, I suggest modern work incorporating structuralist and post-structuralist theory, crammed with self-conscious wordplay and governed by metanarrative and metadramatic concerns, suggests striking similarities in the Renaissance epistemology; like Shakespeare's poetics, contemporary literary theory admits few ontological bounds.

My objectives in this study are, first, to relate the virtuosity or "monstrosity" (Kermode[4]) of Cymbeline to its dramatic context, so far as that can be exactly described. A monster, by definition, is a normative departure: I have not expended much energy in the pursuit of conventional or formal ("generic") standards. Since such a chase traditionally (in Anglo-American criticism) ends in reduction, I have striven to balance theory of genre with a regard for the text at hand, have confined myself to citing few instances of convention and

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3 It is not my intention to transform Shakespeare into our contemporary. I do believe, though, that some of our recent critical concerns accord more closely with his. As Terry Eagleton puts it, "the estrangement of sign from thing which plagues much of Shakespeare's drama is structurally essential for the sign to function at all, and the plays are shrewdly conscious of this truth." William Shakespeare (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 97.

4 Frank Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," in Early Shakespeare, eds. John Russell Brown and B. Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 211. The choice of words evokes Caliban. For an interesting discussion of aberration in Shakespeare, see A.D. Nuttall, "Two Unassimilable Men," in Shakespearian Comedy, eds. J.R. Brown and B. Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), and Terence Hawkes, "Swisser-Swatter: Making a Man of English Letters," in Alternative Shakespeares, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985).

those only where they are helpful.[5] Second, I shall discuss the play's discontinuities while keeping in mind problems of staging and advantages of the Elizabethan stage(s) for which it was designed. Third, given Mowat's fruitful analysis of the romances using the methodology of Modern art criticism, her "perspectivism", and accepting that the plays lend themselves to contemporary modes of thought, application of post-structuralist criticism has something to offer. In my mind the latter is a slightly more refined, if perhaps more radical, descendent of the former. In particular, I think the self-consciousness, the hermeneutic and semiotic play of Shakespeare has been discerningly treated by contemporary theoreticians such as Howard Felperin, Terence Hawkes, Patricia Parker and Terry Eagleton; my own approach has been influenced by all of these. I find that Wolfflin's "linear/painterly" relation suggests Barthes' "readerly/

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[5] I am guided by Tzvetan Todorov's rigorous analysis of genre:

> we must finally . . . formulate a more general and more cautious view of the objectives and limits of any study of genres. Such a study must constantly satisfy requirements of two orders: practical and theoretical, empirical and abstract. The genres we deduce from the theory must be verified by reference to the texts: if our deductions fail to correspond to any work, we are on a false trail. On the other hand, the genres which we encounter in literary history must be subject to the explanation of a coherent theory; otherwise, we remain imprisoned by prejudices transmitted from century to century . . . The definition of genres will therefore be a continual oscillation between the description of phenomena and abstract theory.

See The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 21.

writerly" relation, and so on.[6]

Accounting for context implies attention to historical fact (historicism, New Historicism), which in the case of Shakespeare must largely be replaced by conjecture and resourceful argument. Shakespearean stage history is a perilous game. We have no precise knowledge of the interior details of the Globe and Blackfriars, or of how the plays were staged and acted. Post-structuralism (too often cast by traditionalists as the modern equivalent of the Goths banging at the gates)--with its emphasis on the instability of words, texts, and interpretation, on our final inability as critics to be certain of anything in the text--provides a longed for check or counterweight. Literary "history", such theorists often point out, can become a futile effort to shore up the crumbling (which is to say multiplex) significance of a text; at a certain point, history loses its privileged empirical status and becomes just another fiction.[7] I

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[6] The former is discussed by Mowat, p. 97. The latter is proposed in S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1975).

[7] Mowat, for example, sidesteps history (p. 3). The formalists, at the beginning of this century,

> felt themselves to be fundamentally concerned with literary structure: with the recognition, isolation and objective description of the peculiarly literary nature and use of certain 'phonemic' devices in the literary work, and not with that work's 'phonetic' content, its 'message', its 'sources', its 'history' or with its sociological, biographical or psychological dimensions.

(Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977], 61) This disenchantment with history carries to some extent into structural and post-structural critical practice. At its most threatening, Derridean analysis can be deployed against any discourse, literary, historical, philosophical

intend to engage the two at once, for the close relationship of Elizabethan audience and stage actors was, as Anne Righter has argued, unique, and of importance to any discussion of Cymbeline, while the intertextual/ historical acumen of theorists like Parker is indispensible. Totus mundus agit histrionem perhaps is not that far after all fro Derrida's "il n'y a pas de hors-texte".[8]

As critics such as J.L. Styan (in The Shakespeare Revolution; the title is hopeful) and Robert Weimann (Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre) would have it, critical attention to the Elizabethan stage is unavoidable. Their predictions of the growing primacy of historicism have proven correct, though given the limitations on our knowledge of the time (and in some quarters the growing disregard of history as another form of "interpretation") Shakespeare critics have discovered an entirely new array of potential logical and hermeneutic abuses. As Michael Hattaway observes, "critics often use the 'Elizabethan audience' as evidence in their arguments. These are almost invariably circular. . . ."[9] To give this latest movement some credit, it seems to be an improvement over--or at least an attempt to find a more objective methodology than--the criticism of previous blissfully New Critical decades in

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or otherwise.

[8] Derrida's phrase is elucidated in "The Outside is [crossed out] the Inside" and consecutive sections in Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974).

[9] Michael Hattaway, Elizabethan Popular Theatre (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 50.

which the Shakespearean "word" was institutionalized and nationalized, isolated at all costs from the historical, ideological, semiotic, etc. methods of analysis. The Elizabethan stage is of interest to me precisely because it demands interchange with the audience, requires of its audience a greater imaginative involvement than theatre since (though I reject the romantic assumption that the King's Men worked on a "rude" wooden platform). What information we have, I think, is enough to suggest that the Elizabethan dramatist, and the Renaissance mind in general readily acknowledged the instability of art, that people like Patricia Parker may equally be called post-poststructuralists.

A few final words, most of them not my own. Malcolm Evans, in a diamond-sharp essay, remarks that,

> Given the open-door policy of the comedies (as you like it, what you will), we can confidently anticipate, all else being equal, a decade of Shakespearean Derrideana and Derridoidia, transnational fricasse-burgers a la mode. . . . The recipe for Shakespeare would be to take the instances of what Weimann (1978) calls 'disenchantment', based on festivity and the popular tradition in drama, use them to undercut or problematize mimesis, and season with some Derridean terminology (optional).[10]

Harriett Hawkins, meanwhile, complains of the "stock approaches now being systematically and mechanically imposed on Shakespeare's diverse plays." The result, she writes, "looks suspiciously like an

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10 Malcolm Evans, "Deconstructing Shakespeare's Comedies," in Alternative Shakespeares, ed. J. Drakakis, 88-9.

ideological steamroller in operation."[11] Indeed, one is often troubled with the decision of how best to serve up Swan of Avon, to renovate the plays. To invoke recent critical theory is to invite the charge of abetting a vogue. My preventive strategy has been to permit no single approach a dominant role in my analysis, though the parts of this study, like many of the critical philosophies of this century, are knit together by their concern with semiotics, with signification visual and verbal. Contemporary literary theory has always seemed to me more useful as a set of tools than a religion.

Of interest to me in Cymbeline are the precise symptoms of its "monstrosity": its wordplay and rhetorical distortions; Cloten's "trunk" scene and other visual/ verbal punning; the unrelenting modality of the play (pastoral, patriotic, folklore, etc.); the theophany, which has often been called purely sensational; and the final, monumentally implausible recognition scene. Shakespeare's use of all of the above, I hold, is self-referential and self-conscious; Cymbeline is not an aberration but a tour de force of sign and semblance consistent with Shakespeare's approach from the first. For the sake of clarity, I have included some details of stage history in a chapter of their own.

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11 Harriett Hawkins, The Devil's Party: Critical Counter-Interpretations of Shakespearian Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 5, 7.

I

"Mercury's wings": History

"The most well-trodden subject of all the background aspects of the drama," writes Andrew Gurr, "is the structure of the playhouses," he then treads on with his own chapter.[1] So shall I. On the question of where (bearing on how and why) Cymbeline was staged critics are divided, though recently the consensus seems to be both the Globe and Blackfriars, and likely at court as well. While Forman's account places Cymbeline at the Globe, Bernard Beckerman does not consider Cymbeline a Globe play; at the Globe, he suggests, "no machinery for flying existed."[2] By logical extension, the strangeness of the later plays somehow reflects the acquisition of the Blackfriars in 1608 and the subsequent planning of a new intellectualized, mannerist--perhaps even decadent-- repertoire designed to accommodate the place and tastes of a more elite and sophisticated audience. (The price range at Blackfriars was 6d. to 2s. 6d.; 1d. to

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[1] Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642, 2nd edn. (Cambrige: University Press, 1980), 113.

[2] Bernard Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe: 1599-1609 (New York: Collier Books, 1966), 94. Note that Beckerman is primarily concerned with a period that (probably) precedes Cymbeline.
Dr. Simon Forman's account is reprinted in The Riverside Shakespeare, Appendix B, no. 20, p. 1841.

1s. at the Globe.[3]) Beckerman's assertion that some kind of "change of outlook" followed the leasing of Blackfriars is not disputed--a change in the drift of Shakespeare's plays, as Peter Thomson points out, "has been felt by generations of Shakespeareans."[4] But can we ascribe the evolution of a more stylised drama to the Blackfriars alone? Andrew Gurr, for instance, with Simon Forman's account of the play in mind, suggests both venues.[5] John Ronayne argues that a trap door and flying chair were "essential elements of the Elizabethan theatre as they had been on the medieval stage," that actors at the Globe would have been lowered manually, with the aid of winch gear, and so forth.[6] Gurr attributes the change in the late plays to an alteration in the artistic climate ("Art, in playwriting as in visual forms, became more self-conscious and mannerist"[7]), and adds that the difference in the playhouses' audiences is indeterminate in that we are uncertain of the distribution at the Globe, and of the seasonal relationship of the two theatres. Daniel Seltzer entirely disregards the effects of the Blackfriars:

> Shakespeare did not begin writing in a special

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3 Gurr, p. 12.

4 Peter Thomson, Shakespeare's Theatre (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 64-5.

5 Gurr, pp. 216ff.

6 John Ronayne, "Decorative and Mechanical Effects Relevant to the Theatre of Shakespeare," in The Third Globe, eds. C. Walter Hodges, et al (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 207, 216.

7 Gurr, p. 18.

> way only because Blackfriars had become available, any more than the King's Men decided to lease Blackfriars because Shakespeare's plays were gradually altering in scope and tone.[8]

And Peter Thomson: "The suggestion that the King's Men thought in terms of two repertoires, one for the 'popular' Globe and one for the 'private' Blackfriars, cannot be entertained for a minute."[9] This is only a selection of opinions. We have no reason to rule out performance of Cymbeline at either theatre, and no sound reason to link its curious shape to one theatre alone. I shall add no judgment of my own.

In the hands of structural scholars such as Richard Hosley, John Orrell and C. Walter Hodges, determination of the position and architecture of the Globe (the Blackfriars is more difficult because less depicted--only once, in fact, as Orrell has conjectured) has become an advanced form of calculus. Nonetheless, we know almost nothing about the interiors of either theatre. The stage is of particular interest to me, so I shall delete much general detail. The Globe likely had a tiring-house facade, a stage extending into the yard, a stage trap, a heavens supported by two pillars (possibly there were no pillars in the second Globe) and two or three stage doors. For a low fee, playgoers were permitted to stand in the yard surrounding the stage; others sat in the galleries, of which there were probably three levels. Gurr estimates that the Globe stage

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8 Daniel Seltzer, "The Staging of the Last Plays," in Later Shakespeare (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), 129.

9 Thomson, p. 161.

(like the Fortune) was about 43 feet wide, while the Blackfriars (from a description by Shirley in 1641) would have been approximately half the width--considerably more cramped.[10] Wickham speculates that the stage may have been bounded by a rail--a barrier "between 'game' and 'earnest,'" or stage and world--but a rail, which does not appear in de Witt's sketch, would not have been necessary.[11] Assuming the Blackfriars was a rectangular building, and that the theatre inside was constructed in a similar shape, the stage would have been set across one wall, and the actors would often have been flanked by garrulous young dandies on stools. As Gurr observes, "Players as well as audience must have been crowded uncomfortably close together. No wonder sword play eventually became the exclusive hallmark of public playhouses."[12]

In either theatre the players would have been surrounded, even encroached upon, by their audience, and the dramatic fiction under very close scrutiny. By comparison, the proscenium stage and perspective scenes which grew in popularity after the Restoration were best viewed from a position in front of the stage: by the late 1800's actors no longer stepped beyond the proscenium arch, which

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10 Gurr, p. 145.

11 Glynne Wickham, "The Stage and its Surrounding," in The Third Globe, eds. C. Walter Hodges, et al (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 138.

12 Gurr, p. 145.

became like a picture frame.[13] After the mid 1600's audience perspective began a long narrowing trend, sets and props tended to be more elaborate (the glittering masques of Inigo Jones might be a precursor of this), while productions (a word that has no real application in Shakespeare's era) moved slowly toward "realism". The result, for the spectator in a contemporary picture frame theatre, is a view of something intricate but two dimensional and distant, beyond a portal that theoretically may never be crossed, like Keats' casement onto "faery lands forlorn". In the Elizabethan theatre one (presumably) had the impression of being more a part of the scene: stage groupings no doubt were of lesser concern to the extent that an actor, while some consideration must have been given to the privileged seats to the front and centre of the stage, could not avoid having his back to some part of the audience--something unheard of in the modern theatre, or on television.

The challenge was to take something so obviously illusory (a play), and make it real; to have an actor, probably in contemporary Elizabethan clothing, walk onto a wooden platform (strewn with rushes to dampen the creaks) in daylight and satisfy a crowd, probably none too patient and standing within reach. There is evidence that the design of theatres like the Globe was richer and more detailed than critics of the last two hundred years have commonly held, or wished. Still, the dramatic illusion was subject to very close scrutiny, the

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13 See Richard Leacroft, The Development of the English Playhouse (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973).

possible effect of which is that "many of the plays begin with prologues and inductions openly acknowledging that the play which follows is a fiction. . . . either illusion or delusion."[14] That a stage mirage can become so real, thought many Puritan abolitionists, bodes ill for reality. The point is well taken, for in the Elizabethan theatre art and nature must have been almost interchangeable, the fiction as strong as the reality unstable. Shakespeare plays with the meaning of words and actions, allows the dramatic illusion to fade in and out, plays with our ability to interpret his plays --and his plays within plays. If his play works on the page (and it does: how many of Shakespeare's plays do we read and discuss long before we ever see them on stage?), the transference of it to any stage is bound to be unproblematic. J.L. Styan cites the unconventional, historicist productions of people such as Barry Jackson (in the 1920's) and Tyrone Guthrie (post-Second World War) and writes: "In 1900 readers turned to the scholar to elucidate the plays; in 1970 scholarship seems suspect and the stage seems to be more in touch with the spirit."[15] Styan pronounces a revolution, in part, correctly: the thrust stage and (for critics) visual component of Shakespearean drama now seem the norm--in spite of the approaches of

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14 Gurr, p. 163.

15 J.L. Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution: Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), 232.

Halperin, Parker, Eagleton and others.[16] And in part wrongly, for in this century as in Shakespeare's the word (or sign) is supreme; there is a playful density to the "plays" which attracts stringent textual analysis.

Michael Hattaway suggests that

> Our hypothesis that Elizabethan drama tended towards the emblematic rather than the realistic is confirmed when we consider that the plays consisted of far more than is represented by the printed words that alone have survived.[17]

The Shakespearean actor (perhaps using conventional gestures that we have lost) likely knew how to project potent images to match the words, while later drama relies more on words and props, the drama influenced by the novel. For example, Beckett's Not I (1973), which consists of a mouth carrying on a monologue in utter darkness, deletes the visual component of drama in favour of the aural (though, to be fair, Beckett is attacking conventional staging, a bias which aligns him with Shakespeare ultimately, I think).[18] By comparison, the "symbolist" drama of Djuna Barnes, like her novels, has been

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16 Visual analysis of Shakespeare's plays may often be skirted because the appearance of a play on stage remains infinitely variable. And, so far as these critics are concerned, a workable structural approach has yet to be formulated. Keir Elam, for example, makes a valiant effort in The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London and New York: Methuen, 1980).

17 Hattaway, p. 59.

18 The drift of Jan Kott's Shakespeare Our Contemporary (London: Methuen, 1967) is similar. For a very penetrating critique of Kott see Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The Instance of Henry V," in Alternative Shakespeares, ed. J. Drakakis, 208.

called Shakespearean (by T.S. Eliot). In her case, as often in Shakespeare, the emphasis is on narrative episode and image. In any event, Beckerman argues that

> The actors did not regard the stage as a place but as a platform from which to project a story, and therefore they were unconscious of the discrepancy between real and dramatic space,

that "a character enters not into a place but to another character."[19] The basic unit of dramatic material is a person, the powerful effect of Shakespeare's drama appears to rely on his ability to strip people like Imogen of identity (that is, in the play, of status, sex and familiar surroundings, just as the play itself operates with no specific setting and few props), reducing them to nothing, a meaninglessness that is fertile potential. It is interesting that editors and producers of Shakespeare from 1700 onward sought to localize each scene, in so doing perhaps losing the point in an extraneous and increasingly intricate imaginative panorama. Antony and Cleopatra perhaps has a specific historical precedent, but does anyone need (or really care) to know the geographical locations of The Comedy of Errors or Pericles? An unstable dramatic form can be an asset.

It should be no surprise, then, that few definitive copies of plays were in print.[20] Other disadvantages--such as plagiarism--aside, a play would hardly have been read by the public when it could

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19 Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe, 164, 174.

20 "Ben Jonson's preparedness to publish his plays in Folio in 1616 must have appeared vainglorious"--Thomson, p. 59.

as easily have been seen at theatres like the Globe (imagine a contemporary movie director printing his script for public consumption--assuming such a consolidated script ever exists). Gurr comments that "the durability of print was a secondary consideration, the sort of bonus that would normally only come in the wake of a succe l presentation in the company repertoire."[21] Stephen Orgel suggests that a play "is the property of the performers, not of playwrights, audiences or readers; that the real play is the performance, not the text; that to fix the text, transform it into a book, is to defeat it."[22] To the eternal frustration of Shakespeare editors, he appears to have cared little about the survival, let alone the textual purity, of his plays as a whole. The instability of language as Shakespeare uses it is matched by the elasticity of each of his plays. And though we surmise that certain roles may have been designed with specific actors in mind, we have no idea how the plays might have been modified during production. Since then the plays have at times been altered significantly by Dryden, Bowdler and Shaw among others; fortunately the plays can sustain an amazing amount of damage without a loss of manoeuverability. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that (for all we know) the texts which have descended to us may have been modified by acting companies, scribes or compositors, that the texts have, and probably were intended to

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21 Gurr, pp. 22-3.

22 Stephen Orgel, "Shakespeare Imagines a Theater," in Shakespeare, Man of the Theater, eds. K. Muir et al (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1983), 43.

have, no adamant foundation in anything except the moment of presentation.

With some inductive ingenuity, and perhaps ingenuousness, we can conjecture that the text would have undergone change as it was "produced". As Weimann suggests,

> We can search in vain for the equivalent of the modern stage manager in Shakespeare's theatre. . . . The real decisions--choice of plays, procurement of costumes, distribution of roles, etc.--must have been arrived at by agreement within the troupe of actors and shareholders.[23]

Though we can hear the diesel murmur of heavy equipment Hawkins feared (she herself seems to be well-acquainted with the operation of these machines, at times), Weimann has a point. Shakespeare's plays allow actors a great deal of improvisational freedom, and we can only guess how these plays were produced. Hattaway points out that actors probably were given "rolls" containing their lines alone to be committed to memory. The play would thus begin as a collection of parts, would have no conceptual unity of staging as we know it.[24] In Shakespeare the Director Ann Pasternak Slater concentrates her attention on stage directions explicit and implied by dialogue. But whether or not Shakespeare actually moulded each play as it was rehearsed, it is evident that compared to, say, a play by Dryden, Wilde or Arthur Miller, Cymbeline is amorphous. Directors have

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23 Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978), 214.

24 Hattaway, pp. 53-4.

racked their brains for years over the problem of how to stage the initial scenes of The Winter's Tale. Are Hermione and Polixenes really "paddling palms"? If so, exactly how does one "paddle palms"? and so on. The "meaning" seems designed to remain broad and elusive. Or to put it otherwise, the loss of rigid meaning, something that can be grasped or kicked (as Johnson would have it), ends in a proliferation of hermeneutic possibilities. Act and scene divisions, imposed or strengthened by later editors, are a further attempt to compartmentalize and formalize the plays, to channel their diversity.

Of props, Gurr suggests that "the trappings of public and private performance evidently remained at each theatre."[25] From Henslowe's inventory (see Thomson, p. 166) we know that the number of Hell mouths, Neptune's forks, etc., can be significant--less so when distributed across the entire repertoire. "Noisy devices" used at the Globe would necessarily have been scaled down for the Blackfriars (eg. the cannon in HVIII).[26] Beckerman suggests that, given the many scene changes in a play, and the rapid changes of bill, the stage remained substantially unaltered for each play.[27] There is agreement on the extent and intricacy of costuming. Beckerman, for example, asserts that "Disguise staging is simple, nominal and

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25 Gurr, p. 204.

26 Gurr, p. 160.

27 Beckerman, "The Use and Management of the Elizabethan Stage," in The Third Globe, eds. C. Walter Hodges, et al (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 153.

somewhat standardized"; Styan that "Burbage, Betterton, Garrick . . . all played in the dress of their own period. . . . Not until the nineteenth century did the vogue for historical accuracy arrive."[28] If the actors played in the togs of their time, the clothing probably was rich. Thomson writes that "a close reading of Henslowe leaves no doubt of the importance of costume in the theatre. . . . the conclusion is an excessive concern for costume."[29] Gurr agrees:

> Alleyn's accounts list some quite startling totals for clothing by present day priorities: L20 10s 6d for a "black velvet cloak with sleeves embrodered all with silver and gold", more than a third of Shakespeare's price for a house in Stratford. No wonder Henslowe had a rule against players leaving the playhouse wearing his apparel.[30]

Costumes seldom were simple, though disguise staging was basic. Glitter was a general, as well as a particular, theatrical effect.

From the Duke of Stettin-Pomerania we know that the Blackfriars was artificially lit during a performance.[31] This again raises interesting questions about the transparency and delicacy of the Shakespearean fiction. Modern theatres are darkened to sustain the illusion, even when acted on a thrust stage: the "real" world does not interfere with the drama, in part, because it has been blacked out. Selective lighting is, in this sense, a subtle variation on the

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28 Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe, p. 199; Styan, p. 140.

29 Thomson, p. 31.

30 Gurr, p. 178.

31 Quoted in Thomson, p. 163.

proscenium arch or frame. But more important, when darkness is called for in a play, modern stage lights are dimmed or doused; in the Elizabethan theatre, the audience imagined darkness in response to the dialogue and action on stage. As Alan Dessen puts it, "In the age of Shakespeare, a greater burden thereby lay upon the dramatist, the actor, and the spectator, for only through such imaginative participation could the illusion be sustained."[32] Shakespeare thus is constructing a fiction which he must at the same time acknowledge to be artificial, a game which he complicates by confusing the two for us. It is one thing for an audience (some of whom would be standing close enough to touch the actors) at 3:00 pm at the Globe (let us say) to imagine the storm and murk of King Lear III.ii, but another for them to imagine, then unimagine the Cliffs of Dover in IV.vi. I sidestep the debate on the latter (would the audience have believed they were at the cliffs?) since it is clear enough that Shakespeare is playing with his audience. In Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play Anne Righter treats the insubstantiality of the playwright's art as something which he fought a losing battle against in the course of his career. But his art was always his ally; in passages such as Lear IV.vi.11-24 Shakespeare flexes his ability to create reality from nothing, to show that "madmen" can in fact lead the blind, that the blind can learn to see. It is a premise of the Elizabethan stage that empiricism must be set

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[32] Alan Dessen, "Shakespeare's Scripts and the Modern Director," Shakespeare Survey 36 (1983), 62.

aside, in spite of the sun and the nut cracking gallants on the dramatic periphery. Once into a play, we are caught in an interpretiv maze.

Glynne Wickham asserts:

> we must somehow find . . . means to dissipate the euphoria that encourages us to suppose that we can wholly re-create Shakespeare's Globe playhouse as he knew it; we must, in other words, separate fact from fiction.[33]

The question is, can the two be separated? At the present scholars such as Orrell and Gurr are working to build a third Globe in London; perhaps they have the answer. I must confess that I cannot judge. That, at least, I have learned from the Bard.

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33 Wickham, "The Stage and its Surrounding," 148.

II

"Senseless? not so": Language and Rhetoric

Shakespeare's self-consciousness, his willingness to acknowledge his art (as well as its opacity) is traceable in his playful use of language and rhetoric, of the aural and the visual. He is fond of wordplay that explodes significance, of rhetoric that is entirely lucid (see Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida) or tortuous and recoiled, of the pyrotechnics of designation and description with words. His language is always elastic; the "jouissance" of Johnson's "fatal Cleopatra" occurs in comedy and the darkest moments of a tragedy.[1] Shakespeare's plays are notorious for the amount of information they require their characters to perceive, sift, assimilate, interpret and re-present as narrative; Cymbeline, for instance, like many of the plays, begins with a proleptic narrative, or a telling of what has already occurred. Words such as "report" (which occurs in Cymbeline twenty times) become nexuses of meaning within the text: does "report" mean "rumour", "an account", "a description," or "an opinion"? We cannot know precisely how the word is being used, or

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[1] Barthes coins the term "jouissance" in his The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975). As Hawkes defines it, in Structuralism and Semiotics, jouissance "comes about in 'writerly' texts, or at climactic moments in 'readerly' ones, when that order breaks down, when the 'garment gapes', when overt linguistic purpose is suddenly subverted, and so 'orgasmically' transcended" (115).

the extent to which mediation is involved. All definitions imply that the data is not first-hand--and therefore is unreliable, perhaps indeterminate. Pat Parker suggests that such words are "a kind of semantic crossroads or freighted term."[2] "Report" is fact and/ or interpretation which--when applied to a person--may be representative or misrepresentative of the person they claim to describe. For example, Jachimo says of Posthumus that "This matter of marrying his king's daughter . . . words him, I doubt not, a great deal from the matter" (I.iv.14-17),[3] while Philario says later, "How worthy he is I will leave to appear hereafter, rather than story him in his own hearing" (32-4). To Jachimo's attempt to slander Posthumus, Imogen responds, "Thou wrong'st a gentleman, who is as far / From thy report as thou from honor" (I.vi.145-6); Jachimo responds:

> Be not angry,
> Most mighty Princess, that I have adventur'd
> To try your taking of a false report. (171-3)

The stress on telling or relating ("storying") is important: Shakespeare, too, in his plays is telling us stories, and he is conscious that whatever truth they have may be fragile, or merely fictional, that illusion can easily spill into reality, the stage into the world. The narratives that are so essential in plays like Cymbeline represent, in a sense, the uncertainty of meaning and point to the

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2 Patricia Parker, "Shakespeare and Rhetoric: 'Dilation' and 'Delation' in Othello," in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, eds. P. Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 56, 69.

3 All quotations in my text are from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

potential discontinuities in art. The play opens with a "status report", a summation of what has happened; in it are these lines:

> 1.GENT. He that hath miss'd the Princess is a thing
> Too bad for bad report; and he that hath her
> (I mean, that married her, alack, good man!
> And therefore banish'd) is a creature such
> As, to seek through the regions of the earth
> For one his like, there would be something failing
> In him that should compare. (I.i.16-22)

Both Cloten and Posthumus are beyond description (beyond metaphor, language, signs or signifiers[4]); report shares the limitations of language, and therefore the account of the two gentlemen may suffer similar distortions, the irresolution of a gap. Moreover, Cloten and Posthumus are characterized (rather inaccurately) in terms of polar extremes: the play bears out, I think, that Cloten and Posthumus are not as unlike as the initial scene (and report) would lead us to believe. In the midst of all this, Shakespeare adds an indecent pun, which perhaps cuts to the reality of the situation (that Imogen has become a kind of object). Let us not forget that report equally serves Iago, that if we credit report we risk gullibility. That language is debased in Cymbeline we can infer from the fate of innocent statements like this (Posthumus to Imogen):

> I will remain
> The loyall'st husband that did e'er plight troth.
> (I.i.95-6)

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4 The signifier/ signified relation made famous by Ferdinand de Saussure has become the basis of structuralist and related theories. A signifier is a sign, such as a word, gesture, picture. The signified is that which one has in mind to designate. See Saussure's A Course in General Linguistics, trans. R. Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983).

Posthumus could not be more wrong; these prove to be, as Hamlet says, words, words, words. Language, report, and (by extension) dramaturgy itself must be viewed with suspicion.

The opening symposium includes a passage that is a rhetorical curiosity as well as a bill of fare. The first gentleman says of Posthumus

> I do extend him, sir, within himself,
> Crush him together rather than unfold
> His measure duly. (I.i.25-7)

The sense seems clear enough (the man thinks he has been conservative in his praise of Posthumus), but the metaphor is oddly violent. It is the beginning of a trend that emerges in the play--the uneasy joining of interpretive power to a vicious sexuality--and erupts into contorted (impenetrable) rhetoric. The violence seems primarily to be centred in Cloten, who gives vent to speeches such as these:

> Come on, tune. If you can penetrate her with
> your fingering, so; we'll try with tongue too.
> (II.iii.14-15)

> Posthumus, thy head, which now is growing upon
> thy shoulders, shall within this hour be off,
> thy mistress enforc'd, thy garments cut to
> pieces before [her] face: and all this done,
> spurn her home to her father. . . . (IV.i.15-22)

> with that suit upon my back will I ravish her;
> first kill him, and in her eyes . . . He on the
> ground, my speech of insultment ended on his
> dead body, and when my lust hath din'd (which,
> as I say, to vex her I will execute in the
> clothes that she so prais'd), to the court I'll
> knock her back. . . . (III.v.133-45)

As Arthur Kirsch suggests, the "root of erotic difficulties . . . aggression and narcissism of sensual appetite" so typical to the

so-called problem comedies finds its embodiment here in Cloten.[5] But his dramatic function is more complex: he can be startlingly vicious and salacious, but he is also (in terms of dramatic convention) a clown, a harmless, two-dimensional fool--a "harsh, noble, simple nothing," as Imogen words it (III.iv.132).[6] What is an audience to make of an apparent miles gloriosus, "coxcomb" and "jackdaw" (like Parolles, Lucio, Caliban and others) who spouts obscenities, contorts language and savours the thought of raping and kicking the play's paragon? In Shakespeare appearances, be they semiotic or otherwise, are seldom what they seem; we often are caught off guard. And, after all, Cloten's threats are never realized, so he never quite makes the transition from something akin to a stock fool to a more brutal, jarring and realistic niche. As words and meaning (and art) are plagued by disruption, Cloten seems to represent a fault line in the dis-continuum of this "tragicomic" play. Like Caliban and others of the type that A.D. Nuttall has called "unassimilable men," Cloten possibly is Shakespeare's attempt to acknowledge the ragged edges of art. As characters like Cloten are married to (and interrupt) the texture of comedy and romance, so Cloten's sense, dramatic function and unpredictability are reflected in contortions of rhetoric (and meaning). We perhaps can find an analogue to Cloten's rhetoric in

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5 Arthur Kirsch, Shakespeare and the Experience of Love (Cambridge: University Press, 1981), 148-9.

6 Roger Warren, in "Theatrical Virtuosity and Poetic Complexity in Cymbeline," Shakespeare Survey 29 (1976), 43, finds that "Imogen's language, which combines extreme, even strained, expression with great simplicity is typical of the play's style."

this speech of Leontes:

> Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have,
> To be full like me; yet they say we are
> Almost as like as eggs; women say so--
> That will say anything. . . . (WT, I.ii.128ff.)[7]

to which Polixenes (and an array of critics) can only respond, "What means Sicilia?" Both Leontes and Cloten have "drunk, and seen the spider" (WT, II.i.45), both react almost psychotically to what may be nothing (Cloten "explodes" at the word "garment").[8] The result is a quick glimpse of the limitations of language, a catachrestic tangle that, for an audience especially, must seem a troubling, blank burst of incoherence and obscenity.[9]

In his application of this "trope" of salacity Cloten is not alone; lewdness (and violence) of speech seems to spread like an infectious disease. On the "report" of Jachimo, Posthumus accepts that Imogen has betrayed him and launches into a diatribe against her and women (an entire scene is devoted to this speech alone):

> Some coiner with his tools

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7 Compare The Winter's Tale I.ii.185-205 and II.i.36-53; Iago's rhetoric in Othello; Caliban's in The Tempest, and so forth. Alfred Harbage, in Conceptions of Shakespeare (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 33, suggests that Shakespeare is simply getting "bogged down in his syntax"--I disagree.

8 See Anne Barton, "Leontes and the Spider: Language and Speaker in Shakespeare's Last Plays," in Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honour of Kenneth Muir, eds. Philip Edwards, et al (Cambridge: University Press, 1980).

9 For the tropes I am drawing on George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie, eds. G.D. Willcock and A. Walker (Cambridge: University Press, 1936). Interestingly enough, Puttenham's example of catachresis is this: "I lent my loue to losse, and gaged my life in vaine" (180).

> Made me a counterfeit; yet my mother seem'd
> The Dian of that time. . . .
> . . . O vengeance, vengeance!
> . . . . . .
> A pudency so rosy the sweet view on't
> Might well have warm'd old Saturn . . .(II.v.5-35)

Though Posthumus has more provocation for this outburst than Cloten (the mole is convincing evidence), this speech seems to mark a violation of the "faith" so necessary in the romances (Paulina: "it is requir'd / You do awake your faith"). And an audience would probably marvel to find their heroine being verbally ravished again. In balance, Imogen has a similar outburst of her own:

> Men's vows are women's traitors. All good seeming,
> By thy revolt, O husband, shall be thought
> Put on for villainy . . . (III.iv.54-6 and ff.)

but her language has considerably fewer razor edges, if the same intent. It is pertinent that throughout this play there runs a strain of mercantilism (i.e. money/ power and the drive to possess: in toto, yet another "system" of signification) exemplified by Posthumus' wagering of his ring (Imogen's chastity) against ten thousand ducats, although the play as a whole is riddled with conceits of buying, bartering and trading, often used amorously or sexually. Michael Taylor sees the sexual violence of these speeches as building toward a sexual maturity in the final act, when Posthumus strikes Imogen.[10] Certainly the ferocity flares up like an outbreak of fever, revealing an ugliness beneath the surface even of "Imogen".

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10 Michael Taylor, "The Pastoral Reckoning in Cymbeline," Shakespeare Survey 36 (1983), 105.

The abuses of rhetoric are substantiated when Jachimo attempts to deceive Imogen:

> The cloyed will--
> That satiate yet unsatisfied desire, that tub
> Both fill'd and running--ravening first the lamb,
> Longs after for the garbage. (I.vi.47-50)

Jachimo predatorily harnesses the indeterminacy of language; to this extent he is a version of Iago. Imogen is very much a "lamb", and while we may have an inkling what Jachimo means, she is bewildered and terrified by his equivocation, the litotes and paralipsis of deliberately false, vaguely sexual report.[11] The sense of his words is, for her, elusive and threatening; she is free to interpret frantically, and to this extent the instability of language is working for Jachimo--just, we are reminded, as it could work for Shakespeare. The same sort of frenetic misapprehension occurs in this passage:

> QUEEN. . . . make denials
> Increase your services; so seem as if
> You were inspir'd to do those duties which
> You tender to her; that you in all obey her,
> Save when command to your dismission tends,
> And therein you are senseless.
> CLOTEN. Senseless? not so (II.iii.48)

Cloten here misses the thrust of his mother's words (if they have a single one) or misinterprets; like many of the characters in Cymbeline, he is in danger of being excluded from the "sense" (or perhaps losing the thread) of all that surrounds him. His dilemma is ours,

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[11] For an acute discussion of Shakespeare's use of rhetoric, see Alessandro Serpieri, "Reading the Signs: Towards a Semiotics of Shakespearean Drama," trans. Keir Elam, in Alternative Shakespeares, ed. J. Drakakis.

as audience and critic, and one of which Shakespeare must have been acutely, cannily conscious. As Harriett Hawkins points out:

> So far as semiotics are concerned, how can a critic cope with a drama where, as Terence Hawkes has observed, absolutely everything counts--where all the signals and significations of language, gesture, facial expression, setting, costume, groupings, silences, etc. may act upon and interact with or against each other in differing ways, and with differing effects, from moment to moment, from scene to scene. 'm beginning to end, from production to production?[12]

How indeed. Macbeth likens "life" to "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (or signifying everything, which might as well be nothing, after Barthes): Shakespeare is conscious of this paradox at all times--language is, after all, air--drawing significance from nominal nothingness, compressing to "nothing" a world of signification, creating art that is life on a stage.

There is much to be said in particular of the mercantile system of valuation in Cymbeline. To "value" something often is to give it meaning by arbitrary comparison with something else (this is a system of signification)--in this play, inexorably money: the resulting regime is a mixture of logo- and lucrocentricity. I think that Imogen's actual value is obscured by lines such as this, from Posthumus: "I prais'd her as I rated her: so do I my stone" (I.iv.-

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12 Harriett Hawkins, The Devil's Party, 83. Keir Elam, in The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, concludes that the weakness of the field lays in the division of visual and aural dramatic components. Elam's study is ambitious, and difficult.

77). To Jachimo, Imogen's chastity will not bear ten thousand ducats, for, he rationalizes, "If you buy ladies' flesh at a million a dram, you cannot preserve it from tainting" (I.iv.134-6). And later he remarks, after the bedroom escapade, of Imogen's mole:

> this secret
> Will force him [Post.] think I have pick'd the lock and ta'en
> The treasure of her honour. (II.ii.40-2)

Imogen has earlier vowed she will "pawn [her] honour" for the alleged contents of Jachimo's trunk ("plate of rare device, and jewels / Of rich and exquisite form, their values great" [I.vi.189-91]). Cloten, in turn, avows

> 'Tis gold
> Which buys admittance (oft it doth), yea, and makes
> Diana's rangers false themselves, yield up
> Their deer to th' stand o' th' stealer; and 'tis gold
> Which makes the true man kill'd and saves the thief.
> (II.iii.67-71)

Imogen rejoins with a caveat (emptor): "You lay out too much pains / For purchasing but trouble" (87-8). One final example: Imogen's instinctive response to Posthumus' apparent death is

> How should this be? Pisanio?
> 'Tis he and Cloten. Malice and lucre in them
> Have laid this woe here. (IV.ii.323-5)

Why does she immediately attribute her woes to commercialism? Given that money permeates the play, and obsession with purchasing power seems a universal syndrome, her monetary paranoia is justifiable. Money is a system with which people in the play stamp each other (as Posthumus and Jachimo superimpose it on Imogen). Shakespeare seems to be toying with the money motif: just as the meaning of words

flickers, so does that of baubles and coins, which have value simply because we wish them to.[13] Perhaps there is more sense in Arviragus' assertion:

> All gold and silver rather turn to dirt,
> As 'tis no better reckon'd, but of those
> Who worship dirty gods. (III.vi.52-5)

That is if Arviragus' (somewhat naive) view and the "system of values" indigenous to the pastoral world of Milford Haven can be trusted. Suffice to say that one of the main problems in the play is deliberate mis-evaluation or mis-reading--of persons, of words, of dreams--or, put otherwise, the characters' attempts to impose particular signifiers (say, a ring or ten thousand ducats) on the signified (say, Imogen). Imogen's "significance"--is she really the antiseptic heroine that many Romantic critics imagine her to be?--consistently is overlooked, bruised in an attempt to remake it, or shunned (rape is an ugly method of possessing and marking what one sees). To evade efforts to "read" and shape her, Imogen must flee the court. A feminist critic would call this a good example of sexual/textual politics, a struggle between men and women for significatory power which, in Shakespeare as elsewhere, mirrors the roles of playwright (artist) and audience.[14]

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[13] Compare Lear's "No, they cannot touch me for [coining,] I am the King himself" (IV.vi.83-4). Edwards takes this line as the epigraph of his Shakespeare and the Confines of Art (London: Methuen, 1968).

[14] The unrelenting mercantilism seems partially redeemed in the terms of the wager (I.iv.160-3). However, this is not very convincing.

The scene in which Imogen awakens on Cloten's headless body (which I shall designate as the "trunk" scene, as opposed to Jachimo's trunk trick scene) is the site of critical controversy: the scene and its language seem almost grotesque.[15] Are audiences and critics to laugh at it or look on soberly? The words themselves present immense problems; here also elocution doubles as "dislocution". Metaphors such as this seem naive, farcical and strained:

> Damn'd Pisanio
> Hath with his forged letters (damn'd Pisanio!)
> From this most bravest vessel of the world
> Strook the main-top! O Posthumus, alas,
> Where is thy head? (IV.ii.317-20)

The tone of the words seems light (she awakens with the words "'Od's pittikins!"); more often when Shakespearean characters express deep emotion they rely on silence or resort to primeval sounds like Lear's simple, powerful "Howl, howl, howl!" (and one suspects that even these words are inadequate, given the latitude actors have in

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15 Roger Warren, in "Theatrical Virtuosity" (S.S. 29, 1976) suggests that the "very combination of the 'virtuoso' elements with a reworking of techniques from the comedies" enables Shakespeare to "isolate, highlight such powerful emotions" (48); Michael Hattaway, that Shakespeare would not have written the part if he had not had actors capable of handling its difficulty (84); Barbara Mowat that "when death is real, it is presented as casual or grotesque, one of the things that happen to people in a universe that refuses to take man seriously" (112), for "these characters are often little more than a succession of masks" (115). Schoenbaum's comment that "If the conflicts are a staple of romance, the degree--the magnification is exceptional, as is the lyricism and incandescence with which it is realized," is helpful (see "Looking for Shakespeare" in Shakespeare's Craft, 173). Michael Taylor finds the scene "part of a pattern of erotic punishment" (105). Stanley Wells, in "Shakespeare and Romance" (Later Shakespeare, 1966), observes that "The mood most characteristic of Shakespeare's later handling of romance material is perhaps one that fuses extremes of emotion" (78).

reproducing them on stage).[16] Moreover, Imogen's is the rhetoric of frenetic speculation, psychological strain (compare that of Leontes) and desperate, almost hysterical interpretation: poor Pisanio, we note, is instantly stuck with the crime, while she has entirely "mis-read" the body:

> A headless man? The garments of Posthumus?
> I know the shape of's leg; this is his hand,
> His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
> The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face--
> Murther in heaven? How? (308-12)

The way in which Imogen perceptively works her way up the body seems contrived, and even (oddly) sexually charged (one expects, but does not encounter, an indecent pun). And if she so deeply loves every bone, member and feature of Posthumus' body, how could she mistake them for Cloten's? Either Cloten and Posthumus are interchangeable without their heads (perhaps after all heads and not hearts or bodies are of importance), or Imogen has herself finally been deceived by the clothing which Cloten donned for that purpose--albeit he has only succeeded in the absence of his head. More on this later.

The scene presents a complex of visual, verbal and thematic puns. Thus Imogen:

> I thought I was a cave-keeper,
> And cook to honest creatures. But 'tis not so.
> 'Twas but a bolt of nothing, shot at nothing,
> Which the brain makes of fumes. Our very eyes
> Are sometimes like our judgments, blind. (298-302)

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16 Cf. Cleopatra' indeterminate, serptentine "O!", Antony and Cleopatra, III.xiii.57.

With that last, Gloucester of King Lear would agree. In comparison with the harsh "reality" of the present, the past seems idle fantasy; yet the present is actually an illusion maintained, in part, by Posthumus's clothes. She awakens on a "trunk" (see Lucius, line 353, "Soft ho, what trunk is here? Without his top?") that resonates with Jachimo's trunk, deceptively empty though supposed to be filled with "treasure." Cloten, we perhaps can infer, is equally "empty", and Imogen really fascinated with an image of Posthumus (an interpretation) that is empty. And we as audience are witnessing a scene staged by actors (empty). But enough.

There still are acting and staging difficulties to be surmounted. If Andrew Gurr is correct in arguing that, by 1600, "exaggerated or affected acting" or "Pantomimick action" was deplored in favor of "personation", we have cause to wonder how such a scene could be presented plausibly on stage.[17] John Russell Brown notes of later productions that "the apparent reality as expressed here is so absurd that very few actresses have dared to use all the words provided."[18] Shaw, for example, suggested that "A headless man?" (line 308) be cut from a production of the play, and rewrote Act V.[19] The scene is "absurd" even as the word is used in contemporary Theatre of the Absurd (the work of Beckett, for example): all the

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17 Gurr, p. 110. One could easily find a counter-argument.

18 John Russell Brown, "Laughter in the Last Plays," in Later Shakespeare (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), 121-2.

19 Brown, p. 122.

"meaning" of the scene is imagined by Imogen, a construct of her mind. If there is a deus at this point, he truly seems to be absconditus. It is doubly absurd that Imogen smears the blood of Cloten, whom she loathes, on her face. The scene is very real for her, but not for us and not for the dramatist (and presumably not for Jupiter): we share a god-like perspective, and we view futility. The emotion of Imogen-- spurred by what is really "nothing," a gap in perception--is in fact an "act" in some respects (as it "actually" is an act on stage), a sign of a sign. We are reading a reading, we share her interpretive fascination; there is little difference--and much differance--between the reality of illusion, and the illusion of reality.[20]

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[20] Derrida uses these terms to mean "differentiation" and "deferral", the two functions of language:

> There is, as Derrida would say, no full meaning but only differance (differences, deferment): the signified can be grasped only as the effect of an interpretive or productive process in which interpretants are adduced to delimit it.

See Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 20. The process of designation, Derrida argues, can never be complete, is perpetually ad hoc. See his Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University Press, 1978).

III

"Shift a shirt": Sign and Semblance

Frank Kermode perceives that "the more one looks at all the to-do about clothes, the more difficult it becomes"; it is, he argues,

> a deliberate technical excess: a bravura piece, an example of the master doing something difficult--the intertwining of theme in texture and structure--with very great ease and for its own sake.[1]

The clothing miasma presents interpretive problems for an audience, as well as critical ones for people like us; it is an instance of self-conscious, reflexive and deft dramatic sleight of hand. In the perceptual flux of Milford Haven, identity (ego, sex) is proven less a physical and more a metaphysical distinction. Without apology (as Shakespeare leads us into Milford Haven), I lead you down the garden path and into Shakespeare's wardrobe.

In Cymbeline clothing is a crux. Personal identity is meaning, and clothing affects our interpretation of ourselves and others. In Shakespeare unfolding of clothing often equals unravelling of meaning often equals dilation of narrative or storying. King Lear, for example, opens with a famous "disembarrassment" of estate

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[1] Frank Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," in Early Shakespeare, eds. J.R. Brown, et al., 212-13.

> Tell me, my daughters
> (Since now we will divest us both of rule,
> Interest of territory, cares of state),
> Which of you shall we say doth love us most. (I.i.48-51)

Cordelia will say nothing (the King of France thinks it "monstrous, to dismantle / So many folds of favour"); Lear responds, "Nothing will come of nothing." But he is wrong, for in the course of the play "Lear" becomes nothing which, in the end, seems to be everything, while the graceful copia of the play itself belies the statement that sets it off: the play grows from "nothing". So in Cymbeline appearance can be paradox; the issue of clothing feeds into the larger issue of complexion and perception, reality and illusion of person and place. At the beginning of the scene in which Cloten enters the play, he is introduced to us in this manner:

> 1.LORD. Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt; the violence of action hath made you reek as a sacrifice.—(I.ii.1)

His smell and clothing, his "reputation", precede him; exterior seems to be in harmony with interior. Only Imogen's insult

> His mean'st garment
> That ever hath but clipt his body, is dearer
> In my respect than all the hairs above thee,
> Were they all made such men. (II.iii.133-6)

sets Cloten off on a sequence of laborious computations (he repeats the phrase "mean'st garment" several times) and interpretations that eventually ends in a change into Posthumus's clothes, if not quite his character. Still it is suspicious that Cloten can remark, "How fit his garments serve me!" (IV.i.2), and logical (in a backward way) that Imogen should "fit" as well--notwithstanding that "a

woman's fitness comes by fits." And the change seems to garner Cloten some of Imogen's affections, for she does eventually and very tenderly bury him, and say "a century of prayers . . . twice o'er" on the grave" (IV.ii.391-2). Clothes do not change the man, it seems, unless the man is changed.

Accordingly, Imogen's response to Posthumus's mordant letter is a wish that she could cease to exist (or lose her identity). She is, she laments

> stale, a garment out of fashion,
> And for I am richer than to hang by th' walls,
> I must be ripp'd. (III.iv.51-3)

And Pisanio's solution is appropriate:

> You must forget to be a woman; change
> Command into obedience; fear and niceness
> (The handmaids of all women, or more truly
> Woman it pretty self) into a waggish courage.
> (III.iv.154ff.)

Near the centre of the play, male clothes assist Imogen in a change of sex that puts her on the path to "nothingness" ("I am nothing; or if not, / Nothing to be were better"--IV.ii.367-8) and enables her to escape the hermeneutic madness of the play. To escape interpretation, which is also imposition of power (in this the king is the worst offender), she flees into a masculine mode of being and the lawlessness of the pastoral world, where identity (and signifiers) are indeterminate, or logic is in stasis.[2] For permanent change to

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[2] Julia Kristeva, in "Women's Time" (trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, Signs 7, 1, 13-35), argues that the feminist enterprise has three phases: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and the last:

> In the third attitude, which I strongly advocate--which I

occur in Posthumus' character, it seems that he too must doff his old clothes (and constrictive identity):

> I'll disrobe me
> Of these Italian weeds and suit myself
> As does a Britain peasant; so I'll fight
> Against the part I come with. (V.i.22-5)

It is noteworthy, first, that the identity being discarded is "Italian", which implies that Posthumus has been subject to a kind of insidious cultural possession or that the machiavellian Roman climate nurses destructive sexuality; second, that for both Imogen and Posthumus the change involves a transition into a lower social class, as if the duplicitous exigencies of rank must be thrown off (Imogen transforms through "franklin's huswife" into page; Posthumus through Italian into peasant). It is safe to say that, if anything, the people of this play learn a growing distrust for surfaces, one that is present in the inhabitants of Milford Haven from the outset. Guiderius, for instance, has no regard for the trappings of status:

> CLO. Thou villain base,
> Know'st me not by my clothes?
> GUI. No, nor thy tailor, rascal,
> Who is thy grandfather! he made those clothes,
> Which (as it seems) make thee. (IV.ii.80-3)

As always, there is visual play here: the clothes are in fact not Cloten's but Posthumus's, but these mythic togs were inappropriate to

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> imagine?--the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to <u>metaphysics</u>. What can 'identity', even 'sexual identity', mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged. (33-4)

Quoted in Toril Moi, <u>Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory</u> (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 12.

their first owner as well. Posthumus' "mantle"--the one he left behind when banished--carries with it the aura of apparent virtue that the two gentlemen so kindly and succinctly supplied us in the opening lines:

> I do not think
> So fair an outward and such stuff within
> Endows a man but he. (I.i.22-4)

Indeed, they are completely wrong: the image of the "hero" they present is false; we are invited to fall prey to the rhetoric of "report",[3] to become caught up in an intricate "shell-game" of clothing and character.

The question of clothing in particular implies the question of semblance in general--one of which Shakespeare is fond, given that his art relies on (and flouts) the basic visual deception of the stage, of acting. It is no accident that Elizabethan costuming, if ornate, was never quite time or period specific: why must the soldiers in Titus Andronicus wear Roman robes when the play itself is evidence that perception can be overridden by art? I refer again to the dramatic precis of the two gentlemen, who observe of the present circumstance at court:

> 1.GENT. But not a courtier,
> Although they wear their faces to the bent
> Of the King's looks, hath a heart that is not
> Glad at the thing they scowl at. (I.i.12-15)

The court as political shark pool is almost a cliche (see the

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[3] Shakespeare often opens his plays with third part prolepsis. That at the opening of Antony and Cleopatra, for example, seems to be a brilliant metaphoric compression of the sense of the play; that introducing The Winter's Tale, misleading.

polemics of Belarius, or the courts that predicate The Tempest and AYLI, for example). What distinguishes Cymbeline's court is that his Janus-faced sycophants frown on the outside and smile on the inside, rather than the customary reverse (as they perhaps would if hatching plots). This court, as the two gentlemen would have it, is strangely beset by sneaking well-wishers, who differ from their king only in interpretation of a marriage, by definition a comic event. The courtiers have become actors in a huge play designed to please the king, a drama which Imogen, who has little taste for acting--though one must be a skilled actor to play her--deserts, only to find she must assume an equally powerless role in Milford Haven. The king's "play" (co-written by Cloten and the Queen) is difficult to escape; in a sense one can only change costume.

In Cymbeline Imogen is not universally thought to be acute. Jachimo is willing to challenge the intelligence and morality of any attractive woman, betting that charming exteriors (that is, ones worth the assault) invariably conceal weak interiors (that is, sensibilities that are not "fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified"--I.iv.59-60). One of Cloten's companion lords voices a similar opinion of Imogen:

> 1.LORD. Sir, as I told you always: her beauty and her brain go not together. She's a good sign, but I have seen small reflection of her wit. (I.ii.29-31)

Does beauty imply wit? Does wit imply beauty? Does social status imply wit and beauty? and so on. The answer to all is Not necessarily. There are many shells in this game, and there are never any

"correct" configurations, as hard as people like Cloten and Posthumus strive for one. When Jachimo presents his evidence of Imogen's infidelity, Posthumus replaces one set of assumptions--that wit must be handmaiden to beauty--with another, as absolute but opposite:

> Let there be no honor
> Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance; love
> Where there's another man. (II.iv.108-10)

The key word is "semblance"; the weakness in his reasoning is his refusal to accept the unreliability of appearance (and the interpretation or translation of its features). If there is a rule to the game, it is more likely that interpretive generalizations cannot be made, that one cannot judge a beetle by its shard. Imogen may be a "good sign", as Cloten's companion reports, but it is helpful to keep in mind the potential disparity (or gap) between the sign and that which it represents.

The tension in the play of appearance and signification, the struggle to see, designate and know is apparent in the collision of Imogen and Cloten:

> IMO. O blessed, that I might not! I chose an eagle,
> And did avoid a puttock.
> CYM. Thou took'st a beggar, wouldst have made my throne
> A seat for baseness.
> IMO. No, I rather added
> A lustre to it.
> CYM. O thou vild one! (I.i.139-43)

There are two accounts of the situation here; neither seems quite correct. To be sure, one of the motifs of the play is a linkage of Posthumus to an eagle, but then to the Roman sibyl the eagle is of course a symbol of Rome. Moreover, in the course of the play

Posthumus proves less than an eagle, while Cloten (or at least the part that Imogen reveres in the "trunk" scene) seems to attain a status somewhat greater than "puttock". Posthumus, in return, does not seem to come into contact with the precise nature and "value" of his wife until he literally strikes her out of her disguise--and back into "Imogen"--in the final scene. But let us return to the two gentlemen of the first scene, and their "reading" of Posthumus and Imogen:

> To his mistress
> (For whom he now is banish'd), her own price
> Proclaims how she esteem'd him; and his virtue
> By her election may be truly read,
> What kind of man he is.
> 2.GENT. I honor him
> Even out of your report. (I.i.50-5)

Notwithstanding the freighted words "read" and "report", there is a sweeping attribution of motive here--and of course we again have an application of the omnipresent and dubious commercial metaphor. But this passage makes a startling point: that Posthumus's "value" (and that of the play itself, in some respects) depends on the "value" of Imogen ("Your daughter's chastity--there it begins" says Jachimo in the final scene, line 179), who is more of a variable in the equation than its other constituents--Cloten, Jachimo, Posthumus, Cymbeline, the Queen, Lucius, etc.--think.

The propensity of these people to foist identities on each other (in this Imogen and Posthumus are in a similar fix) may end in disaster, but the general expectation that underlies phenomena such as "report" certainly is the curse of the Queen. While denying it,

she works and experiments her way inextricably into the complex of expectations that is the "wicked queen" stereotype. The poor misinterpreting king, we note, is the sole person who does not recognize the cliche when he sees it; but then, as Alfred Harbage discerningly puts it, in Shakespeare, "in our quest for meaning, we move in a hall of mirrors where every vista recedes to a vanishing point."[4] The egressus of Shakespeare's wardrobe may perhaps be found in these lines, of Posthumus: "To shame the guise o' th' world, I will begin / The fashion: less without and more within" (V.i.32-3). Perhaps Posthumus has found the solution; this might be a statement of Shakespeare's poetics.

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[4] Alfred Harbage, Conceptions of Shakespare, 77.

IV

"Will poor folks lie?": Modality

Critical dissatisfaction with Cymbeline is fuelled by its self-conscious, metadramatic (some would say faltering and impertinent) alliance with convention. Is the play, after Polonius, a tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy or romance? All elements are present in a bewildering proliferation that lends itself to Todorov's analysis of "oscillation".[1] Barbara Mowat has suggested (after Wolfflin) the term "adventitious"; one might also say the play is aggressively modal and probably metageneric. In comparison to earlier work such as The Comedy of Errors, which obeys the classical unities, Cymbeline seems a loose assemblage of episodes that coalesce incredibly into the final scene. Of the "plotting" (i.e. sequential logic) of the play, Hallet Smith remarks:

> Whether these plot developments are "infantile joys" [as Shaw wrote] or not, they are the very stuff of romance, and anyone who reads romance for what it is, or sees it in the theatre for what it distinctively offers, must accept them.[2]

Smith apologises for romance because it is not tragedy--its Folio classification--comedy or history, when in fact it is more likely a

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[1] Again, in The Fantastic, 21.

[2] Hallet Smith, introduction to Cymbeline in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1520.

conflation of the three, and more--as Pat Parker argues, romance is "inescapable", an end in itself.[3] Stanley Wells supplies a traditional definition of Shakespearean romance:

> frequently includes the separation and disruption of families, followed by their eventual reunion and reconciliation; scenes of apparent resurrection; the love of a virtuous young hero and heroine; and the recovery of lost royal children.[4]

Frye calls romance "popular", "conventional" and "primitive", while Parker treats it as a mode or methodology with a specific poetics of deferral and delay.[5] Barbara Mowat's solution is to "admit their 'generic ambiguity,' label them 'tragicomedies,' and turn one's attention to more important matters".[6] Like Bernard Beckerman, she finds the unity of Shakespearean romance to be narrative rather than formal or structural (that romance "wanders", as Parker expresses it). Beckerman argues that

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3 See her Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode (Princeton: University Press, 1979).

4 Stanley Wells, "Shakespeare and Romance," in Later Shakespeare, 50.

5 Parker's concept of deferral is derived from Derrida's binary opposition of difference/ differance. Parkers "romance" is a perpetual (unfulfilled) hermeneutic wandering.
As Woolf writes:

> And if we ask why we go further astray in this particular region of English literature than in any other, the answer is no doubt that Elizabethan prose, for all its beauty and bounty, was a very imperfect medium.

See "The Strange Elizabethans," in The Common Reader: Second Series, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1986), 9.

6 Mowat, p. 5.

> unity must arise from the dynamic interaction of the various parts of the drama: story, character, and language. Our task is to discover how this was accomplished.

"Modern audiences suffer from 'fourth act fatigue' in witnessing a Shakespearean play," he finds, because "they have a greater interest in dramatic line than in the narrative."[7] I have rehearsed the question of genre and comprehensive form so that I can suggest it be left behind; generalisations of genre, as in the case of Polonius' dramatic catalogue, tend to be self-negating. One must avoid stamping this play with such an unnecessarily reductive theoretical schema.

From the first lines of Cymbeline we are conscious that we are being set up for a story we have heard before (elsewhere in Shakespeare, in the Metamorphoses, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Sidney, Spenser, Tasso, Rabelais, The Rare Triumphes of Love and Fortune, Sir Clyomon and Clamydes):[8]

> 1.GENT. His daughter, and the heir of's kingdom (whom
> He purpos'd to his wive's sole son--a widow
> That late he married), hath referr'd herself
> Unto a poor but worthy gentleman. She's wedded,
> Her husband banish'd, she imprison'd: all
> Is outward sorrow, though I think the King
> Be touch'd at the very heart. (I.i.4-10)

These might be the ingredients of a "tragedy" (in his estimation that the king is "touch'd at the very heart" the gentleman seems to

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7 Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe, 29, 35.

8 For what is accepted to be a definitive source study, see G. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, vol. 8, Romances, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

be wrong). The dramatic alternative to such a third person summary is the direct address, like a "briefing", of a prologue; the conversation of the two men has the advantages both of providing necessary data and anticipating audience response to it. For example, the king's heirs have somehow been pilfered from under his very nose:

> 2.GENT. That a king's children should be so convey'd,
> So slackly guarded, and the search so slow,
> That could not trace them!
> 1.GENT. Howsoe'er 'tis strange,
> Or that the negligence may well be laugh'd at,
> Yet is it true, sir.
> 2.GENT. I do well believe you. (I.i.63-7)

The prologues of HV and HVIII, for instance, are quite blunt in admitting the artifice of the play that follows; here our doubts are anticipated and met by the men on the stage--they are, after all, a convenient little audience to the narrative of the play, a form of the play within a play; they both represent our interest and attempt to think for us. How much license we permit them in that endeavor is another matter. Mowat labels these "presentational", as against "representational" or mimetic, devices. She suggests that "by deliberately displaying the fictiveness of his Romance world,"

> Shakespeare heads off attacks of "implausibility," and says to us, in effect, "I never claimed this play was more than a fiction." Thus disarmed, we can respond fully to the delight and wonder of the final revelations and reunions.[9]

At what point, though, do Shakespeare's mimetic disclaimers become gratuitous, and have an opposite effect? At times he seems to be

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9 Mowat, p. 64.

proscribing unquestioning belief, as in this summary of a phase of the battle in Act V:

> LORD. This was strange chance.
> A narrow lane, an old man, and two boys!
> POST. Nay, do not wonder at it; you are made
> Rather to wonder at the things you hear
> Than to work any. Will you rhyme upon't,
> And vent it for a mock'ry? Here is one:
> "Two boys, an old man (twice a boy), a lane,
> Preserv'd the Britains, was the Romans' bane."
> LORD. Nay, be not angry, sir.
> POST. 'Lack, to what end?
> Who dares not stand his foe, I'll be his friend;
> For if he'll do as he is made to do,
> I know he'll quickly fly my friendship too.
> You have put me into rhyme. (V.iii.51-70)

The problematics of authorship aside, certainly this is a densely self-conscious passage. Again, whether or not we would have thought of it ourselves, we are reminded of the strangeness of the narrative, of its artificialities, by this stylized jangle. Shakespeare seems to be deliberately archaizing here, drawing our attention to an old--perhaps "mouldy"--tale, in this case partially drawn from Holinshed, though tales of "mean knights" fighting their way to startling glory (as in Pericles) were current. (And are: they have remained one of the underpinnings of western [capitalist] society.) The essence of this technic can be found in lines like this from The Winter's Tale: "Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep and not an ear open" (V.ii.61-2), though Mamillius' "A sad tale's best for winter. I have one of sprites and goblins" (II.i.25-6) is perhaps the most potent, provocative and resonant of such self-reflexive statements in Shakespeare. It is rather a truism that at that point Leontes enters the scene and

steps into a "winter's tale", moves from a phase of psychological analysis (interpretation) as incipient fiction into one of hopelessly muddled reality and tale: the "story" swallows him up. The same may be said for the passage above from Cymbeline: Posthumus scoffs at the fictional potential of the situation (this seems obligatory), then recasts the story in a doggerel rhyme that is also Shakespeare's parody of his own art. Within lines Posthumus realizes he is speaking in verse, is (to his frustration) speaking like a fictive character which, to the extent that he is on a stage in a public theatre, he is. Once again it is difficult to untangle the world and the stage. The effect is duplicated in the first few lines Posthumus speaks when he awakens after the theophany:

> But (O scorn!)
> Gone! they went hence so soon as they were born.
> And so I am awake. Poor wretches that depend
> On greatness' favour dream as I have done,
> Wake, and find nothing. But, alas, I swerve.
> Many dream not to find, neither deserve,
> And yet are steep'd in favours; so am I,
> That have this golden chance and know not why.
> (V.iv.125-32)

Posthumus speaks in rhyme, though the rhyme "fades" after line 132, as if the side-effects of Jupiter's fictional universe are fading with it. It is noteworthy that Posthumus is here unconscious that he speaks in verse (like an actor); the "art" at which he once scoffed (let there be a lesson in this) has engulfed him. Philip Edwards, in Shakespeare and the Confines of Art, writes:

> The Shakespeare whom I wish to present is the experimenter, engaged in a continuous battle, a quarter of a century long, against his own scepticism about the value of his art as a model

of human experience.[10]

It is common for critics to speculate on Shakespeare's attitude toward his work, and to imagine some sort of progression of disillusionment, culminating in The Tempest, to the plays (as Righter does in Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play). Perhaps there is a growing self-consciousness in the plays (such teleologies are precarious), but it might equally be attributed to Shakespeare's greater confidence in his ability to create "illusion"; we might equally wonder about the value of "human experience" as a model of Shakespeare's "art". There is, I think, a tendency to link the wordplay and self-consciousness of Shakespearean drama to a kind of evolving nihilism (the same is said of contemporary literary theory, with its skepticism about meaning). It is easy to forget that the instability of meaning, the "gap" between sign and signified, is not only an abyss but a place of infinite possiblity, just as the stage is not necessarily a blank wooden platform.[11] Though it is technically a "tragedy", King Lear turns the doctrine ex nihilo nihil fit on its head.

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[10] Edwards, p. 10.

[11] In Writing and Difference, 20, Derrida writes:

> Our discourse irreducibly belongs to the system of metaphysical oppositions. The break with this structure of belonging can be announced only through a certain organization, a certain strategic arrangement which, within the field of metaphysical opposition, uses the strengths of the field to turn its own strategems against it, producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly delimiting it.

Cymbeline is at once a compendium of types, devices, conventions and motifs, and a series of self-reflexive, often ludic, departures from them. Imogen is an example of an egregiously innocent and beseiged heroine who proves not so innocent. "Alas, poor Princess, / Thou divine Imogen, what thou endur'st" says the second lord (II.i.56-7). The word "divine" dogs her (like Cloten). The only solution to her situation seems to be to cease to be who she is: that is, female, of high estate and patient. And note, while her time in Milford Haven erases all temporarily (her innocence perhaps forever), the dilemma is permanently resolved when her two brothers are found, and she no longer is heir apparent.[12] Her estate reduced, she becomes a fit wife for Posthumus, and so on. Her fight seems primarily to be against what is expected of a beautiful princess; she is resisting--or stepping beyond, in other words--convention. The same may be said of the exchange of love tokens, a narrative and dramatic device which we have seen at work in Shakespeare from the first (The Merchant of Venice, Troilus and Cressida), but which here appears almost obligatory, an old artistic pattern which life unconsciously adopts and works through, although the ring and bracelet, like many other signs in the play, fail to carry out their intended function, become confused or lost, should not have been relied upon.[13] The convention of the Italian villain bends and warps

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12 See III.vi.74-8.

13 "The wager story basic to Cymbeline," notes Bullough, "is almost as widespread in folklore and literature as the 'terrible bargain' of Measure for Measure" (12).

under similar pressure. After reading the murderous letter from Posthumus, Pisanio finds in it Roman machination:

> What false Italian
> (As poisonous tongu'd as handed) hath prevail'd
> On thy too ready hearing? Disloyal? No (III.ii.4-6)

an inference that Imogen also immediately makes upon reading the letter: "That drug-damn'd Italy hath outcraftied him, / And he's at some hard point" (III.iv.15-16), and later, "some jay of Italy / (Whose mother was her painting) hath betray'd him" (49-50). And finally Jachimo, as if partaking of this obliviousness to logic, is only too willing to confess:

> mine Italian brain
> Gan in your duller Britain operate
> Most vildly; for my vantage, excellent. (V.v.196-8)

We can attribute all of this to Elizabethan patriotism but I think it goes deeper; Shakespeare's use of the convention is almost flamboyant, certainly self-negating. The letter touches off in the minds of Pisanio and Imogen a search for meaning. That they settle so consistently and unerringly, and with so little evidence, on Italy (they appear to be relying on "report" here) suggests that we are witnessing an abuse of interpretation, the reading into a text of a limited meaning where it may not be warranted, as in the case of the two gentlemen in the first scene and (potentially) we who are watching the play. Moreover, Italy may be a diabolical land, but given that equivocation appears to be rampant in Cymbeline's court (Imogen is disguised when she complains, above), the accusations of Pisanio and Imogen smack slightly of irony. As for the Italy we see

in the play: the actions of the gentlemanly Philario balance those of Jachimo, who proves a gentleman in the end anyway. We see no "jays". The poison, again, seems to be more of a problem in Britain. And, in spite of all accusations of shiftiness, the play ends with a truce and the return of Britain to Italian arms.

There are many folklore *fabulae*, faintly recognizable or otherwise, in the play. For instance, Imogen's flight to and sojourn in Milford Haven suggests the Snow White story, while III.vi brings to mind the Three Bears. Bullough (p. 24) notes that "*Snow White* was probably not known in Elizabethan England; but elements of the story appear in many ballads and romances." Bernard Harris suggests that, in comparison to the other plays, the narrative range of *Cymbeline* makes it a sort of capping achievement:

> To appreciate *Cymbeline* to the full there seems no doubt that we should endeavor to see it with proper regard for its Stuart mode, as a dernier effort, a general muster of the whole forces of Shakespeare's wits, drawing upon the past resources of themes in his poems, comedies, histories and tragedies, to provide an offering for its sophisticated audiences at the Globe, at Court, and its author's royal patron.[14]

Value judgments aside, there is something to be said for this. The play incorporates and flouts conventional modes of all kinds; is constructed for and flouts audiences and critics; both embodies and undermines the Shakespearean canon.

Shakespeare's use of the pastoral mode is interesting; there

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[14] Bernard Harris, "'What's past is prologue': *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII*," in *Later Shakespeare* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), 213.

are disparities between what characters expect of the pastoral world and what it delivers--it is not, for example, the elysium that Imogen and Belarius imagine it to be. Like Prospero's (technically Caliban's) island, Milford is a desert of meaning, but a garden of possibility. In some respects Milford Haven functions as doggedly as a machine, and its input, output and process deserve some attention. For one, this "green zone" magnifies the philosophical and ideological clash suggested by these words of Duke Senior in As You Like It:

> Come, shall we go and kill us venison?
> And yet it irks me the poor dappled fools,
> Being native burghers of this desert city,
> Should in their own confines with forked heads
> Have their round haunches gor'd. (II.i.21-5)

Pastoral that incorporates harsh vicissitudes of some sort is nothing new; the sixth book of The Faerie Queen has its Blatant Beast, while war eventually follows Pyrocles and Musidorus into the green world of Sidney's Arcadia.[15] The Duke in As You Like It exalts the virtues of pastoral living, but seems anxious to forsake the hot and cold of the Forest of Arden just the same. More rapidly in Cymbeline the languid serenities of the forest give way to an inhospitable interpretive and ideological murk, though Imogen (who obviously has been reading Theocritus and Virgil, and not Shakespeare's earlier plays) yearns to be there:

> Would I were
> A neat-herd's daughter, and my Leonatus
> Our neighbor shepherd's son! (I.i.148-50)

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15 For a contemporary definition of "pastoral", see Paul Alpers, The Singer of the Eclogues: A Study of Virgilian Pastoral (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979), 4.

This is the (stereotypical) scenario of the curse of status and beauty, the princess who would be a milkmaid and lead a vaguely simpler, apolitical life, like Perdita and her Florizel in the fields of Bohemia (which they eventually flee). The same romantic doctrine surfaces in a later speech:

> Had I been thief-stol'n,
> As my two brothers, happy! but most miserable
> Is the [desire] that's glorious. Blessed be those,
> How mean soe'er, that have their honest wills,
> Which seasons comfort. (I.vi.5-9)

The premise is that she will escape from stricture and policy to bucolic freedom and simplicity. The locus of this unusual serenity is to be Milford Haven, in (occupied) Wales, to which Imogen's enthusiasm and phraseology--

> say, and speak thick
> (Love's counsellor should fill the bores of hearing,
> To th' smothering of the sense), how far it is
> To this same blessed Milford (III.ii.56-9)

--lend a heavenly air (indeed, the quest to Milford is particularly susceptible to a Christian reading).[16] "Sense" probably means sense of hearing, but might easily indicate a smothering of rationality. The word "haven" is used reverently elsewhere, as when Pisanio says of Posthumus that "He would not suffer me / To bring him to the haven" (I.i.171-2). The term and place carry with them connotations of isolation and peace, neither of which Imogen, who soon has on her lips the (boot camp) aphorism "Plenty and peace breeds cowards; hardness ever/ Of hardiness is mother" (III.vi.21-2), finds in harsh,

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16 See Frye, Kirsch for example.

embattled Milford Haven.

The pastoral world is not quite as it should or appears to be; there are no Virgilian swains singing their loves here. In Milford Haven she does not meet her love, as anticipated, but learns instead that he wants her murdered. Her old identity is lost, as I have argued, while her new one seems unsatisfactory:

> I see a man's life is a tedious one,
> I have tir'd myself; and for two nights together
> Have made the ground my bed. (III.vi.1-3)

Her sex has changed but vicissitude has not: existence, even for a man, remains stubbornly difficult. Moreover, this place of innocence and variety seems rather too varied, even unpredictable:

> Two beggars told me
> I could not miss my way. Will poor folks lie,
> That have afflictions on them, knowing 'tis
> A punishment or trial? Yes; no wonder,
> When rich ones scarce tell true. (III.vi.8-12)

Even in Milford surfaces and appearances, which Imogen anticipates will be innocent, may not be trusted, as perceptions may not; idealism wars with materialism here too. And corruption is not limited to Italians or simply to rank, but proves truly universal and democratic--the other face of a romanticized "simple" life, she learns, can be stark poverty. Thus the pastoral world itself defies interpretation, and as other outsiders (with violent purposes) begin to pour in, Milford Haven becomes a zone of perceptual interruption, a place of suspended meaning, a virtual wonderland. Rosalie Colie writes that "this landscape is very far from the nourishing pastoral landscape to which Theocritus turned":

> this is unmitigated hard pastoral, a rocky, difficult terrain training its inhabitants to a spare and muscular strength sufficient to wrest their nutriment from its minimal, ungenerous, exiguous resources.[17]

In Milford Haven Imogen finds that she is not as free of political constraints as expected (after all, Milford becomes a battleground), while physical hardships increase. In this pastoral world she witnesses the ostensible burial of her husband. She perhaps attains "lamb" status in the pastoral sense, but let us not forget her plea to Pisanio: "Prithee dispatch, / The lamb entreats the butcher" (III.iv.95-6). And a few lines later:

> Why hast thou gone so far,
> To be unbent when thou hast ta'en thy stand,
> Th' elected deer before thee. (107-9)

The old medieval correlation of "hart hunting" and "heart hunting" here receives a dark twist; to be pastoral can be to lay oneself open to aggression. This pastoral landscape is a mixture of convention and ugly conventionality. Here all laws are in abeyance, a state of affairs which can be as deadly as it is fruitful.

Belarius is a spokesman for Milford Haven as it should be (but notably is not); his project is a thorough interpretive processing, the product of which will be a brittle (possibly bitter) and hermetic ideal. For instance, in his initial pastoral polemic, he moralizes,

> [Stoop,] boys, this gate
> Instructs you how t' adore the heavens, and bows you
> To a morning's holy office. (III.iii.2-4)

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17 Rosalie Colie, Shakespeare's Living Art (Princeton: University Press, 1974), 295-6.

Belarius has only just entered the play and the penchant for ascetic generalization that will characterise him--and which, incidentally, bears a surprising resemblance to the aristocratic rhetoric of poverty (i.e. that it is virtuous)--is being exercised. But there is more, much more; like Ulysses' positivist lecture on "degree, priority and place" (and perhaps as potent) Belarius' pastoral vision (read: interpretation) unfolds. "To apprehend" that the court/ privileged estate is rife with corruption, he declares to his sons,

> Draws us a profit from all things we see;
> And often, to our comfort, shall we find
> The sharded beetle in a safer hold
> Than is the full-wing'd eagle. O, this life
> Is nobler than attending for a check;
> Richer than doing nothing for a [bable];
> Prouder than rustling in unpaid-for silk:
> Such gain the cap of him that makes him fine,
> Yet keeps his book uncross'd. No life to ours.
> (III.iii.17-26)

The mercantilism of a mercenary court is replaced by a metaphysical trade in pastoral beauty and ingenuousness. But the implicit comparison of the two boys to beetles is, in a sense, uninspiring, even if it hits the mark. Furthermore, such a metaphor is hypocritical, for Belarius thrills at the slightest sign that the boys aspire to be "eagles". Mortgaged silk perhaps is a burden onerous to the conscience, but surely the fight for survival in the wilds presents somewhat more of a problem? Belarius continues:

> this twenty years
> This rock and these demesnes have been my world,
> Where I have liv'd at honest freedom, paid
> More pious debts to heaven than in all
> The fore-end of my time. (III.iii.69-73)

When do the virtues of of the cloister give way to parochialism

and ignorance? In spite of Belarius's saws, one suspects that few men aspire to be a beetle. Fortunately such a discursive masquerade is easily undermined and exposed; Guiderius, post-structuralist critic that he is, remarks flatly:

> well corresponding
> With your stiff age; but unto us it is
> A cell of ignorance, travelling a-bed,
> A prison, or a debtor that not dares
> To stride a limit. (III.iii.31-5)

One can suffer under a debt to pastoralism as well. Belarius's well-wrought interpretation is met with discerning counter-interpretation; Milford Haven, as we have always suspected, does not quite submit to being styled a Golden World.

Like Imogen, Belarius claims to believe that "Th' imperious seas breeds monsters; for the dish, / Poor tributary rivers as sweet fish" (IV.ii.35-6). Yet his pastoral propaganda is racked by amazing bouts of (what can only be termed) snobbery. These usually erupt in asides or in monologues at the ends of scenes; they act as a startling sub-surface commentary, and if not hypocritical they at least suggest that Belarius's pastoral fervor is merely another kind of political pretence. One moment anatomizing the virtues of natural hardship, the next Belarius, alone, says:

> They think they are mine, and though train'd up thus meanly,
> I' th' cave [wherein they] bow, their thoughts do hit
> The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them
> In simple and low things to prince it much
> Beyond the trick of others. (III.iii.82-6)

At an assertion like this, Robert Weimann, with his regard for the "structural quality and social function" of Shakespearean drama (p.

xiii), must blanche. It is odd that Belarius should abjure the court, then rejoice that his charges exhibit courtly characteristics (which he attributes to nature. Is the nurture of a wild life after all ineffectual?). If the sons of kings do not in fact require an appropriate education, then "pastorality" is extraneous, and he should spare us his polemic. Alternatively, Belarius is attributing without cause to an aristocratic lineage the boys' high aspirations. In either case this mentor is operating under a logical double standard, a fact which Shakespeare seems to be emphasizing by juxtaposing the two rhetorics to the point of redundancy (and maybe self-parody). Nature, it seems, is what (exegetically) one makes it. In another amazing passage, the sententia continues:

> ARV. I know not why
> I love this youth, and I have heard you say,
> Love's reason's without reason. The bier at the door,
> And a demand who is't shall die, I'ld say
> "My father, not this youth."
> BEL. [Aside.] O noble strain!
> O worthiness of nature! breed of greatness!
> Cowards father cowards and base things sire base:
> Nature hath meal and bran, contempt and grace.
> I'm not their father, yet who this should be
> Doth miracle itself, lov'd before me. (IV.ii.20-9)

This passage bears detailed analysis. Judging from Arviragus' response to the boy who is in fact his royal sister, as an Elizabethan/ Jacobean audience we might infer (a.) that members of a family cleave (almost supernaturally) together or (b.) the same for royalty. Either this passage represents a bow to the class system, or it does not. Belarius, who is unaware of Fidele's true nature, would have us

believe that the boys' immediate love for her is a manifestation of their high birth (of the fact that they are "meal" and not "bran"). Thus, depending on how we interpret the scene, Belarius' hauteur gains an order of magnitude from the dramatic irony. On the other hand, given the political climate of the time (when one false step dramatically and idealogically could cause both the troupe and the dramaturge to be dismembered), the scene is remarkably subtle. The power structure was (formally) founded upon the assumption that the monarch's position at its apex could not be challenged. Hence the necessity to locate all people, by "nature", within the echelons of a class system, a system which apparently has an override, if we can judge from Bolingbroke's usurpation of the crown of Richard II (the reign of Henry IV is--as superstitious decorum demands--rocky, but with a few moral and dramatic acrobatics, Shakespeare manages to land Henry V soundly on the throne). Furthermore, in his power plays Shakespeare had the growing pressure of the rising "middle" classes--perhaps the bulk of his audience--to deal with, an influence which he assimilates in, for example, A Midsummer Night's Dream in the form of the artisans and mechanics.[18]

The middle class influence is apparent in the above passage, I suggest, in the aside, which draws attention to itself and aristocratic doctrine by its blind enthusiasm and slightly jarring materialism (Belarius politicizes a simple act of love), and by its

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18 James Kavanagh suggests that their threat is defused in the fumbling metaphysics of the play, "Pyramus and Thisbe". See "Shakespeare in Ideology," in Alternative Shakespeares, ed. Drakakis.

likeness to similar passages throughout the play. There has been a tendency in the past for critics to regard Shakespeare as a great royalist and upholder of the Tudor status quo (see, for instance, E.M.W. Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture).[19] That social structure may not have been as stable as "World-picture fanciers" and many more recent critics have wished.[20] Belarius' snobbish commentary invariably interrupts the mood of the scene in which it occurs. And we might also ask--in view of Guiderius and Arviragus' willingness to sacrifice their father (they are not aware that he is not their father), to sacrifice anyone at all, before a strange youth--whether Belarius has anything to rejoice in. A more generous response to the "bier at the door" would be to sacrifice oneself rather than one's father, I think. At least Belarius is willing to die for his principles.

The guardian alternates throughout between fastidious democratic pastoralism and hyperbolic observance of class propriety. The princes' treatment of an apparently lower-classed Fidele (this seems to be the sense: they are being charitable even though they are of

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19 One is often informed that the "nature/ nurture" question is closed.

20 The phrase is Hawkes', who finds a "recurrent siege mentality" in the work of Wilson, Tillyard, J.M. Robertson, E.E. Stoll, L.L. Schucking and other critics of the war years. See "Telmah", in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, eds. Parker and Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 324 and passim. On the instabilities of Elizabethan society, see Lacey Baldwin Smith's This Realm of England (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1983). Gurr takes up the question in more detail in his Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), 49ff. Historical approaches, like critical ones, are of course subject to change.

high rank) inspires in Belarius this outburst:

> O thou goddess,
> Thou divine Nature, thou thyself thou blazon'st
> In these two princely boys! . . .
> . . . . . .
> 'Tis wonder
> That an invisible instinct should frame them
> To royalty unlearn'd, honour untaught,
> Civility not seen from other, valor
> That wildly grows in them but yields a crop
> As if it had been sow'd. (IV.ii.169-81)

It is appropriate that Belarius opens this speech with a sort of prayer to Nature (for him, the goddess of royal lineage, perhaps his particular "dirty god"), for though he protests that there is much to be learned from the natural world, he implies that it ultimately is fit only for lower orders of people; the lower orders both teach us and are unfit for us, his logic suggests. At any rate, the definition of "nature" that he is employing above is at odds with the pastoral identity that Belarius is affecting--he claims to be quit of tawdry court trappings and selfish policy, but his reasoning is inappropriately worldly.[21] Perhaps Belarius has not thrown off

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[21] Paul Alpers' discussion of Shakespearean pastoral, in the case of As You Like It, is helpful:

> The play, indeed, is one of the most striking pieces of evidence that shepherds' lives, not landscape, are at the heart of pastoral. But even when we recognize that the pastoral world of Arden is to be defined by its inhabitants, there is something odd about it: there are more courtiers in it than natives, and the courtiers define the tone and concerns of the play. Shakespeare thus makes explicit what has always been clear about pastoral--that it is a sophisticated form, that it is of the country but by and for the court or city. Hence the emphasis of the play is not on the represented shepherds but on the courtiers who represent themselves as shepherds . . . At the other extreme, Touchstone and Jaques self-consciously test the relation between one's self and one's costume, one's style

the political world as much as he wishes to believe.

The turbulence of the conflicting ideologies (pastoral and courtly) is apparent elsewhere in Belarius' discourse:

> Though mean and mighty, rotting
> Together, have one dust, yet reverence
> (That angel of the world) doth make distinction
> Of place 'tween high and low. Our foe was princely,
> And though you took his life, as being our foe,
> Yet bury him as a prince. (IV.ii.246-51)

Belarius might easily have argued that common courtesy demands that all people, princely or not, be entitled to a burial, but such reasoning would be viewed by the state (Shakespeare's patron for so many years) as subversive. Still, Belarius may be missing the point; as always, though he claims otherwise, his "pastoral" musings are perceptibly tinged by the concerns of the court. He consistently attacks the court but defends (royal) nature, despite the ironic fact that the same royal nature from which the boys are descended is responsible for his unjust banishment, and for the mismanagement and current degeneracy of the court.

Fortunately Milford Haven militates against all divisions; in its confusion of meaning and logic the pastoral maelstrom creates a kind of equality among people--in a sense, it obliterates identity and reduces to a common "nothing," to dirt or static primality, all those who enter its zone. As Lucius says to Fidele:

> Away, boy, from the troops, and save thyself;
> For friends kill friends, and the disorder's such

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of speech, and one's adopted roles.

"What is Pastoral," in Critical Inquiry 8 (Spring, 1982), 457-8.

As war were hoodwink'd. (V.ii.14-16)

In Milford discord itself is discordant, a double negative that cancels itself out. Imogen finds herself on the Roman side, Posthumus arrives with the Romans, fights as a British peasant and is arrested as a Roman. Distinctions of degree, priority and place are turned on their heads. For instance, Cloten, dressed as Posthumus, enters Milford Haven in search of Imogen (now a boy), but meets Guiderius, a prince who appears to be a "rustic mountaineer" (IV.ii.-100). "Hear but my name, and tremble" (87) blusters Cloten, though that word, as we might expect, has no more meaning in Milford than "Toad, or Adder, Spider" (90); such signs have lost any distinction. Furthermore, Cloten unsuccessfully invokes rank (the signification of money):

> To thy further fear,
> Nay, to thy mere confusion, thou shalt know
> I am son to th' Queen.
> GUI. I am sorry for't; not seeming
> So worthy as thy birth. (IV.ii.91-4)

Here Cloten has (rather provocatively) been reduced to equality with a rustic, though in fact the rustic is of a similar rank. And not estate or appearance, but the demeanor (lack of courtesy) of the stranger is important to Guiderius:

> Have not I
> An arm as big as thine? a heart as big?
> Thy words I grant are bigger; for I wear not
> My dagger in my mouth. (IV.ii.76-9)

This passage has implications for Belarius' snobbish hierarchy, which the two princes appear to disregard in favour of personal conduct. The confrontation is ingeniously constructed to please both the

aristocracy and the lower classes: on one level we are witnessing a disruption of the class system, while on the other a prince is refuting a usurper. It is interesting that such a potentially egalitarian philosophy should issue out of the mouth of the next king of Britain, as again here:

> The law
> Protects not us; then why should we be tender
> To let an arrogant piece of flesh threat us,
> Play judge and executioner all himself,
> For we do fear the law? (IV.ii.125-9)

We are reminded that in Milford Haven institutionalized law seem to be suspended (all men are "equal" before the lawlessness), while basic courtesy is of paramount importance. The clash of systems carries into the final scene, when Cymbeline finds that Cloten has been murdered:

> CYM. He was a prince.
> GUI. A most incivil one. The wrongs he did me
> Were nothing prince-like; for he did provoke me
> With language that would make me spurn the sea
> If it could so roar to me. I cut off's head,
> And am right glad he is not standing here
> To tell this tale of mine.
> CYM. I am sorrow for thee;
> By thine own tongue thou art condemn'd, and must
> Endure our law. Thou'rt dead. (V.v.292-9)

The disarray of the pastoral world appears to have spilled into the court; were we not aware that the young man speaking is a prince (the snobbish asides have this function, at least), this scene would have the look of open insurrection, a direct challenge to the authority of the monarch. Once more Guiderius' motive is Cloten's incivility, while the king is in the incongruous position of applying the letter of the law to his son. Belarius, who has a few lines

previous predictably read class distinction into Imogen's unmasking ("[To Guiderius and Arviragus.] Though you did love this youth, I blame ye not, / You had a motive for it"--V.v.267-8), leaps to his charges' defense with these remarkable words:

> Stay, sir King.
> This man is better than the man he slew,
> As well descended as thyself, and hath
> More of thee merited than a band of Clotens
> Had ever scar for. [To the Guard.] Let his
> arms alone,
> They were not born for bondage. (V.v.301-6)

Even assuming that all previous instances of alleged "snobbery" are an effect of modern critical dementia (i.e. that I am sliding into an unwarranted, subversive Marxist analysis of Belarius' rhetoric), this argument is logically unsound and, yes, undermined by the text. For instance, are we to infer from the second line that murder is a privilege of rank? Even Tudor/Stuart monarchs knew that the limit of their prerogative lay far short of that mark. In the first Henriad Shakespeare demonstrated that toppling a king (and writing about it) is a tricky business. Here the challenge remains similarly unresolved; the volatility of the situation is snuffed in Cymbeline's joy at the recognition of his sons, and forgotten.

Near the end of her stay in Milford Imogen observes, "I am nothing; or if not, / Nothing to be were better" (IV.ii.367-8), a fate which Posthumus, who has discovered a personal death wish on the battlefield, soon shares as a British prisoner. After speaking contradictory words such as "Most welcome, bondage! for thou art a way, / I think, to liberty" (V.iv.3-4) and "O Imogen, / I'll speak

to thee in silence" (28-9), and wishing for the noose, he slips into the oblivion of sleep. The pastoral zone has become the great leveller of men and women; like the fool of King Lear it teaches acceptance of the fertile indeterminacy of meaning, a disregard for the "common sense" of logic and hierarchy. The Jailer's words in this regard are well worth heeding:

> I would we were all of one mind, and one mind good. O, there were desolation of jailers and gallowses! I speak against my present profit, but my wish hath a preferment in't. (V.iv.203-6)

I am not building up to the conclusion that this jailer is the encoded key to a subtextually proposed radical leftist order. But these words have a political overtone dampened by their issue from a clown, and their drift seems to be in accordance with the effect of Milford Haven. Most of the people in the play end up there and emerge changed, as if something has been "learned" in the pastoral world (if it is such a place), or an interpretive reconfiguaration has taken place. As Jaques says, "Out of these convertites / There is much matter to be heard and learn'd."

Patriotism is yet another mode used gratuitously in Cymbeline: its spokesmen are, of all people, the Queen and Cloten. Joan Rossi studies III.i, a scene which seems especially anomalous, and concludes that "throughout the scene, Shakespeare systematically undermines the conventional attitudes expressed at the outset," a view more or less upheld by Glynne Wickham, who connects the patriotism with King James's regime (his refusal to go to war with Spain and

harmonizing of Scotland and Wales into Great Britain).[22] Let us compare the rhetorical, mythopoeic, propagandist brilliance of, say, Henry V, with this:

> CLO. There be many Caesars
> Ere such another Julius. Britain's a world
> By itself, and we will nothing pay
> For wearing our own noses. (III.i.11-14)

followed by the Queen's cunning invocation of Clio:

> Remember sir, my liege,
> The kings your ancestors, together with
> The natural bravery of your isle . . . (15ff.)

During this pivotal moment (a major war is about to be declared) the head of state remains silent, is "standing water", while Cloten and the Queen obstreperously carry on negotiations. The scene ends with juxtaposed hostility and hospitality: "I know your master's pleasure and he mine: / All the remain is 'Welcome!'" (84-5). The king seems rather disaffected, possibly baffled, by it all, to say the least. The scene is replete with contradictions that are not resolved when the monarch finally does present reasons for entering the war (the Pannonians and Dalmatians also are rebelling, III.i.72-6; the king does not wish to "appear unkinglike," III.v.7) which only seem flimsy. This is to be a war of appearances, and Milford Haven will be the site. No doubt there are elements of the English feeling of kinship with the Romans and shrewd recognition of James's interests

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22 See Joan Rossi, "Cymbeline's Debt to Holinshed: The Richness of III.i.", in Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered, eds. C. McGinnis Kay and H.E. Jacobs (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 104 and Glynne Wickham, "Riddle and Emblem: A Study in the Dramatic Struture of Cymbeline," in English Renaissance Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 108-10.

here, but Wickham, I think, simplifies. Their decisive nationalistic ardor wins them some respectability, adds to Cloten and the Queen an unsettling realpolitik dimension. The sight of such villains shaping foreign policy is enough to provoke questions about the uses and abuses of power, word and image, both nationally and dramatically, then and now.

Designated throughout by nothing but her official title, and drawn from a type "commonplace" even in the Sixteenth century, "the Queen" is surely a convention being conventional, and (in the Shakespearean manner) she seems conscious of it:

> No, be assur'd you shall not find me, daughter,
> After the slander of most stepmothers,
> Evil-ey'd unto you. (I.i.70-2)

A poison plot--the beautiful but strong-willed step-daughter must die--is trite but obligatory, as are diabolical experimentation and a toadish son. Thanks to the self-conscious interference of Cornelius (who explains aside that the potion will induce no more than a "show of death"--a device we have seen in Romeo and Juliet) the plot is foiled. And of course she ruthlessly covets the crown, saying (aside) of Cymbeline's distraction in III.v., "May / This night forestall him of the coming day!" (68-9). Andrew Gurr suggests that "it is not saying very much to note that the categorisations of characters in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays usually admit of half-a-dozen broad types."[23] Fair enough. But, atypically, Shakespeare is using the type of the "wicked queen" in such a way that

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23 Gurr, p. 104.

we can predict most of his moves--she is a chess queen. Certainly she is unique in her anxieties of being a dramatic convention, and with good reason: she ends, Cornelius reports, "With horror, madly dying, like her life" (V.v.30-6) despairing only that "the evils she hatch'd were not effected" (60). The poison is of interest because it is a conventional device (i.e. something Elizabethan audiences would have seen, and Shakespeare would have used, before) to which Shakespeare adds a tropological function:

> If you are sick at sea,
> Or stomach-qualm'd at land, a dram of this
> Will drive away distemper. (III.iv.189-91)

Imogen takes the drug because she is "sick still, heart-sick" (IV.ii.37), sleeps and awakens into a different, unstable world, where Posthumus seems dead and her friends vanished, and where war reigns. In her mind, this state is indistinguishable from its predecessor; one seems a dream, the other a nightmare. On the other hand, her despair at the loss of order seems to have a healing effect. To lose one's significance, to become nothing, provides an opportunity to begin again; the poison creates a kind of "death" that ends in a revised "life". The same might be said of Posthumus, of whom the Queen astutely remarks,

> Return he cannot, nor
> Continue where he is. To shift his being
> Is to exchange one misery with another. (I.v.53-5)

Like Imogen, to escape constraint Posthumus ends up in Milford Haven, where he finds the more literal bondage that of course leads to freedom--this is the structural logic of Shakespeare's pastoral, of

polarities that co-exist but cannot be bridged. One cannot shift one's being, but one can choose to erase it where everything is interchangeable, the type of divine femininity for the life of a page, or the role of masculine virtue and courage for that of a peasant patriot. In this at least we can trust the wicked step-mother's judgment: she is the Queen of types, and ought to know.

V

"I do know her spirit": Asides

Cymbeline has many dualities and surfaces, not the least of which is Shakespeare's play with art as manifest in asides. Soliloquies aside (Shakespeare "'out-Herods Herod' in profusion and variety of soliloquies"[1]), the asides often trouble critics who attempt to polish the play to an aesthetic high gloss.[2] In part the dissatisfaction is a response to our inability to decide just how asides were staged. Were they presented as conscious address of the audience or more "realistically", as thinking aloud? Bernard Beckerman suggests that "realism", as contemporary critics apply it to the Renaissance, is anachronistic, that "significant instances of spatial compression contradict this theory. Many asides give the actor neither time nor motivation for creating verisimilitude."[3] Weimann takes a similar tack, though his analysis begins with the medieval stage, where direct address was more common, a convention of "interplay of representational and nonrepresentational modes of

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1 Morris Arnold, cited in Mowat, p. 53.

2 "It may well be felt that this 'sophisticated artlessness' is wasteful of some of the richer potentialities of the material." See Cymbeline, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), xxxiv.

3 Beckerman, Shakespeare at the Globe, 161.

drama" that persisted into the Sixteenth century.[4] I side with Weimann, who sides with Mowat; whether or not asides were aimed directly at the audience, they constitute a dislocation of the continuity of the play--and certainly in Cymbeline, if not in the Shakespearean "canon" as a whole, the asides systematically fracture the play, set up an undertow of text and alter-text, exegesis and counter-exegesis.

While the soliloquies tend to be "expositions of situation and character, villainous plottings, explanations of disguise, apostrophes, ragings and lamentations" (Mowat), the asides tend to explicate motive, project and ideology--in the same sense that we as critics can have a "literary project," or specific interpretive objectives. Belarius' interjections, as I have already remarked, often are an injection of snobbery (asides proper: IV.ii.24-30; iv.53-4), a commentary that may be at variance with the "play". The Queen naturally turns to the aside to plot or gloat, as in I.i.-103-6; v.27-31; III.v.68-9. But the aside has more self-conscious, and I think more subtly vicious, application. For instance, there is a rather ponderous cluster of asides in I.v.:

> Enter Pisanio
> QUEEN. [Aside.] Here comes a flattering rascal, upon him
> Will I first work. He's for his master,
> And enemy to my son. --How now, Pisanio?
> Doctor, your service for this time is ended,
> Take your own way.
> COR. [Aside.] I do suspect you, madam,
> But you shall do no harm.
> QUEEN. [To Pisanio.] Hark thee, a word.

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4 Weimann, pp. 102-3.

COR. [Aside.] I do not like her. She doth think she has
Strange ling'ring poisons. I do know her spirit,
And will not trust one of her malice with
A drug of such damn'd nature. Those she has
Will stupefy and dull the sense awhile,
Which first (perchance) she'll prove on cats and dogs,
Then afterward up higher; but there is
No danger in what show of death it makes,
More than the locking up the spirits a time,
To be more fresh, reviving. She is fool'd
With a most false effect; and I the truer,
To to be false with her. (I.v.27-44)

It is difficult to imagine a greater tissue of policy and deceit, both deictically (horizontally, within the text) and epideictically (vertically, text/audience). The Queen is deceiving Pisanio and Cornelius, both of whom are deceiving her, and who (technically) are misleading each other, since Cornelius has not revealed his suspicions to Pisanio. The object in question is a poison that is to look like a drug but is a drug, though not the same drug Pisanio has in mind. As audience we are deceived by this technic to the extent that the metaphysics of this situation loop back upon themselves intricately: these are actors playing people who are "acting" various roles at once (mother, wicked stepmother, Queen, queen; loyal aide, naive lackey; etc.). And, need I remind you, above all (since Shakespeare pretends to show us all) these characters are pieces on a game board, moving to a brilliant strategy of which we are not perfectly aware until the final scene, when we see that the pattern is one of the oldest possible. Shakespeare manipulates characters manipulating one another and the audience--and perhaps he also is manipulated. But the passage above is troubling in other respects, for in the feint and thrust of policy, of role-playing, the concept

of morality (yet another form of sequential logic) has become lost or scrambled. Pisanio is taken in by the Queen's wiles, but Cornelius (are not doctors always sage?), perhaps being a type, recognizes the Queen as one and deflects her scheme, though in another play Posthumus' apparent death might have induced Imogen's suicide (see Romeo and Juliet). Furthermore, Cornelius's solution to his suspicions seems rather irresponsibly provisional, since someone somewhere will suffer the inconvenience of being put to sleep (perhaps the king--arguably a setback in this time of war), while the Queen is bound to be more successful next time round. And what of Cornelius's final words: "and I the truer / To be false with her"? On one level, Cornelius's logic is in keeping with necessity in a kingdom that has of late been upside-down--in a time of emergency, laws must be waived. But on another level, Cornelius is juggling the interpretive tags "true" and "false", and with the fate of the kingdom potentially hanging in the balance (who knows what else the fiendish Queen is up to), who is he to decide which will be which? I remind you of Cloten's promise to Pisanio:

> what villainy soe'er I bid thee do, to perform it directly and truly, I would think thee an honest man. (III.v.112-13)

While I am arguing hyperbolically to make my case, I am not certain that this assertion is separable from that of Cornelius; in Cymbeline, I suggest, such attempts as these men make to separate true/false end in disaster. The king, for example, takes his queen for "true" while she is "false", Imogen for "false" who seems more

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AVIS

"true", Cloten for "true" when false". In the "play" interpretation of right/ wrong, true/ false, real/ illusory is frustrated, a kind of hermeneutic vortex that extends from the stage to envelop the "world". Language and appearance (signs) do not necessarily designate being. That these words may be delivered in asides that overshoot the "reality" of the play adds velocity to the point.

Characters in this play strain to be beyond themselves, others and the influence of the play--as Prospero has shown, the arts of magic, stagecraft and statecraft are similar. Whether or not they are successful is another matter. There are two scenes (I.ii and II.i) in which Cloten's interpretation of himself is relentlessly subverted by another: his salacious bravado is met and abrogated by the Second Lord's mercilessly, almost viciously witty critique. The negation is at times quite literal:

> CLO. If my shirt were bloody, then to shift it. Have I hurt him?
> 2.LORD. [Aside.] No, faith; not so much as his patience.
> . . . . . .
> CLO. The villain would not stand me.
> 2.LORD. [Aside.] No, but he fled forward still, toward your face. (I.ii.5-16)

As an audience we might wonder why we are being subjected to this; not only is the lord blatantly (and at first puzzlingly) disrespectful, but we have a sense that the witty copia here is another Shakespearean display, if not up to the standard of As You Like It. Moreover, we are being asked to choose between two "commercial messages": one, Cloten's, vaguely supported by the First Lord and presenting him as a valorous gallant untaxed by a duel with a man of

little account; the second epideictic, addressing us directly and presenting a vaunting clotpole-Cloten. Authority is being asserted and grudgingly complied with; presumably the rebellion is acceptable because Cloten's position in the court is "unnatural," like that of his mother. There is a similar series of salvos in II.i., of which this is representative:

> CLO. Is it fit I went to look upon him? Is there no derogation in't?
> 2.LORD. You cannot derogate, my lord. (43-4)

The insult involves deployment of wordplay, a proliferation of meaning and interpretation that is also a challenge to authority. The Second Lord is Thersites-like in his insistence that Cloten is not an Ajax, Achilles or Ulysses, that he is nothing. Like Thersites he acquiesces to the ruling paradigm (this passage also ends with an obligatory "I'll attend your lordship"--line 51), while at the same time challenging it by bringing his case directly to a greater power--the audience. Here is his version of a story that is recast and retold throughout:

> Thou divine Imogen, what thou endur'st,
> Betwixt a father by thy step-dame govern'd,
> A mother hourly coining plots, a wooer
> More hateful than the foul expulsion is
> Of thy dear husband, than that horrid act
> Of the divorce he'ld make. The heavens hold firm
> The walls of thy dear honor; keep unshak'd
> That temple, thy fair mind, that thou mayst stand
> T'enjoy thy banish'd lord and this great land! (57-65)

This voice seems authoritative, but it should not be, since the Second Lord's enterprise is so obviously to demolish one story (Cloten's) so that he can replace it with his own. And, I might add,

the Second Lord is imagining Imogen to be the fulcrum of the play, a circumstance that she has been attempting to avoid from the outset. By his account she is saccharine, but then one can scarcely fault him for his loyalty, even if the play is entitled Cymbeline and not Imogen.[5]

That the walls of her dear honour do not quite hold firm is evident in one of Imogen's own asides:

> LUC. 'Lack, good youth!
> Thou mov'st no less with thy complaining than
> Thy master in bleeding. Say his name, good friend.
> IMO. Richard du Champ. [Aside.] If I do lie and do
> No harm by it, though the gods hear, I hope
> They'll pardon it. (IV.ii.374-9)

True, this aside is in part a dramatic expediency (Imogen's identity must remain concealed if the plot is to progress), and a necessary scruple if her character is to remain unbesmirched. But Shakespeare seldom makes a dramatic move purely out of convenience: he is perhaps irrational at times, but never simplistic. I suggest that Imogen also is here finally partaking of or participating in the discourse of deceit, the maze of appearance that is the other side of the play--as she must. If there is "no harm by it," it is because she is

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5 One of Imogen's concerns is to resist deification, and reification, a process begun by Posthumus and carried on by critics since. Mary Daly links such behaviour to what, in a cutting critique, she terms the "sado-ritual syndrome":

> In the Sado-Ritual we find, first, an obsession with purity. This obsession legitimates the fact that the women who are the primary victims of the original rites are erased physically as well as spiritually.

See Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 131.

in Milford Haven, where language is indeterminate--"Richard du Champ" and his fictional reality are as good as any, in spite of their potential for departure from the grand "story" designated by the gods.

VI

"Divination": Theophany

Jupiter's divine schema, his imperative cum narrative, is open to interpretation, is debatable. To be sure, the theophany in V.iv has seemed sensational, self-reflexive, alien and artificial to critics; as a result, Cymbeline has been alternately canonized and excommunicated. The doggerel rhyme of the ghosts, for example, Dover Wilson joins with Granville-Barker in denouncing as "jingling twaddle", then suggests that the play be jettisoned from the canon. Dover Wilson marvels that J.C. Maxwell is willing to accept the theophanic scene which canonical "critics as eminent and as diverse as Pope and Johnson, Edmund Chambers and Granville-Barker dismiss as 'a spectacular theatrical interpolation'".[1] Since the Cambridge edition is edited by Maxwell, I allow the latter a word edgewise: "I cannot feel that the evidence for denying [the play's authorship] to Shakespeare is at all strong."[2] I attribute Cymbeline to Shakespeare.

As Eugene Waith suggests, Cymbeline draws on the convention of the descent from heaven, and possibly as specific a source as the

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1 Dover Wilson's preface to Cymbeline, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), x.

2 Maxwell, p. xiii.

corresponding scene from Clyomon and Clamydes. Kenneth Muir infers that Shakespeare "realized that the descent of Jove on the eagle would keep the audience interested. What he was writing was hardly more than a libretto," adding that Blackfriars may have made such a spectacular scene possible, that such intricate scenes may have catered to the "fashionable taste" in the reign of James I, and that pre-christian era plays make such theophanies plausible.[3] The scene is a shocking change of pace, but I think we must be cautious as critics not to fit it to an agenda, to hastily load it into or fire it out of a canon that may not be Shakespeare's own.

Cymbeline's episodicity has been much remarked and lamented; it is fitting therefore that Jupiter should arrive in the fifth act to whip this recalcitrant plot into line:

> Whom best I love, I cross; to make my gift,
> The more delay'd, delighted. Be content,
> Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift.
> . . . . . .
> Rise, and fade.
> He shall be lord of Lady Imogen,
> And happier much by his affliction made.
> This tablet lay upon his breast, wherein
> Our pleasure his full fortune doth confine.
> [Jupiter drops a tablet.] (V.iv.101-11)

Finally we see one of the "gods", the coordinators of the pre-christian universe, to whom the characters of this play have been praying. But while this god is apparently setting things straight, his speech is "riddled" with indeterminacy and ambiguity--and what is worse, this god seems to be in a hurry. Having instructed the ghosts to

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3 Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare: Contrasts and Controversies (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1985), 70, 75.

mind their own business, Jupiter explains his divine rationale--whom he loves he crosses, etc.--which in fact is an "irrationale". By implication, to be ill-favoured of Jupiter is to prosper, or at least to suffer less pain. Thus the Divine Order has the look of capricious and willful prerogative; the efforts of Imogen and Posthumus to find a shred of logic in their ordeal futile, because there is none. The entire scene is suggestive of deus ex machina, or perhaps more accurately deus ex nihilo, a relation in keeping with Shakespeare's commitment to "nothing". It is noteworthy that the head of the universe, the master signifier, seems ruled by whim; the apparent comprehensibilities are indeed (arbit-)rarities. Moreover it is important that the god at the helm of the universe, such as he is, does not appear directly to any of the people in the play, but while Posthumus sleeps (Jupiter has induced sleep, or the reverse?). The manner of his appearance, I am suggesting, casts doubt on Jupiter's ostensibly absolute authority. For instance, the third line of the passage quoted above--"Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift"--is an amphibologism, or may be read in more ways than one, as may the last line.[4] Obviously, Jupiter could be responsible for Posthumus' ultimate return to good fortune; but (equally) one cannot escape the suspicion in the final scene, in which the word

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[4] Puttenham, p. 260, observes of the figure amphibologia:

> these doubtfull speaches were vsed much in the old times by their false Prophets as appeareth by the Oracles of Delphos and/of the Sybilles prophecies deuised by the religious persons of those dayes to abuse the superstitious people, and to encomber their busie braynes with vaine hope or vaine feare.

"gods" is much bandied about, that Jupiter may be receiving more credit than he deserves. Given the play's lack of linearity, reading in reverse certainly has its attractions. Jupiter's order may not be a powerful force in this play at all (until V.iv, the second last scene, when Jupiter arrives to supply us with the greatest interpretation of all: "He shall be lord of Lady Imogen, / And happier much by his affliction made"); such a possibility sends a shock all the way down the hierarchical line: Cymbeline's power, too, may be arbitrary, while we have always known that the Queen and Cloten are in power merely because they should not be. Furthermore, that portable, two-line doom seems drawn from the standard bag of hefty (but trite) divine aphorism. Technically, does not all suffering have the effect of rendering its victims "happier much" simply because it ends? This is hardly reason for "affliction" to be desired.

The theophany is strange because it is abrupt and brief, and Jupiter is laconic, almost dispassionate. But though he is curt with the ghosts (and with us, which says much about our status as audience) in speaking his intentions, the ordinance he inscribes for earthly consumption is more circuitous. Perhaps Jupiter's will is set down in writing, in a "book" ("This tablet lay upon his breast, wherein / Our pleasure his full fortune doth <u>confine</u>"), but, to the contrary effect, it is written in the form of a riddle to be read, puzzled over and interpreted by people, and to which there is no

"correct" answer except one that people formulate.[5] Jupiter's appearance, however spectacular, has been seen and noted by no one in the play; by comparison, the riddling tablet is a pathetically weak (because convoluted and subject to human unravelling) manifestation of divinity. The fate of Posthumus, I think, is hardly "confined" at all. The text of the riddle reads like this:

> POST. (Reads.) "When as a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be embrac'd by a piece of tender air; and when from a stately cedar shall be lopp'd branches, which being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow; then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate and flourish in peace and plenty."
> 'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen
> Tongue and brain not; either both or nothing,
> Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such
> As sense cannot untie. (V.iv.138-48)

If Jupiter's will is to be implemented to the letter, why is he leaving this programme to his divine plan, save to impress his "audience" with his own divine "art"? Meaning remains a maze: for example, "lion's whelp" could signify anything, as might elements B,

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5 Of the oracle in The Winter's Tale, Howard Felperin notes:

> Despite its extraordinary clarity and definitiveness, the pronouncement turns out, as we have begun to realize, to be disturbingly difficult to verify or validate. Since it is supposed to be itself a validation, there is nothing left to fall back on when its validity is questioned, other than Cleomenes' reported awe. The god's language without the god to back it up is a bit like paper currency without any gold behind it.

"'Tongue-tied our queen?': The Deconstruction of Presence in The Winter's Tale," in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, eds. P. Parker and G. Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 8ff. Felperin's approach is refreshing.

C, D. The riddle is an allegorisation to which an infinite number of interpretive configurations (or variables) can be fit. True, Jupiter may know exactly what he means, but how do the people stuck with the riddle? Posthumus' words following the reading of the riddle (lines 145-8 above) are contorted by the paradox, and they suggest the discontinuity of the play: the riddle is either a "senseless speaking" or "a speaking such that sense cannot untie," either meaningless (and therefore open to any meaning) or beyond meaning (practically meaningless).[6] In either case, the message must be "decoded" by human minds, and will become a human message. Posthumus ends his meditations by contradicting himself:

> Be what it is,
> The action of my life is like it, which
> I'll keep, if but for sympathy. (148-50)

This is a fallacy often duplicated by critics: criticism as egotism, the interpretation that pretends to be Jovian law. In this respect Posthumus' expectations of the tablet are ungrounded:

> A book? O rare one,
> Be not, as is our fangled world, a garment
> Nobler than that it covers! Let thy effects
> So follow, to be most unlike our courtiers,
> As good as promise! (V.iv.133-7)

The question is, what is the tablet promising? Though words be written, they are as indeterminate as ever, they present a shifting surface that any translator can only fix with uncertainty.

Shakespeare has supplied us with a model of such a critic: the

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6 The meaning of the passage itself is of course rather uncertain.

soothsayer Philarmonus, whose interpretations we can interpret. He is truly a study of the unconsciously ideological critic at work. No doubt I will be thought unkind for criticisizing this critic ("change places, and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?" says Lear. "Critic" is derived from Greek krites, or "judge"), but his credentials--on which the solving of the riddle/discovery of the happy ending of the play depend--demand detailed examination. For example, in Act IV we witness a test-run of his soothsayer's art:

> Last night the very gods show'd me a vision
> (I fast and pray'd for their intelligence) thus:
> I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, wing'd
> From the spungy south to this part of the west,
> There vanish'd in the sunbeams, which portends
> (Unless my sins abuse my divination)
> Success to th' Roman host. (IV.ii.346-52)

Surely the Shakespearean audience would have found the fasting and praying to pagan gods, with its potential to produce only a delirium, amusing. Even assuming that the eagle is an obvious symbol of Rome, the sunlight, the south and west might designate anything--the reading, though, establishes a harmonious and auspicious (and convenient) unity. Perhaps I have previously taken too much license in my discussion of divine will, its transmission, and mortal interpretation. But consider: Philarmonus (the name means literally "loving music") is providing us with a gloss that is completely, obviously wrong, for the Roman host is vanquished. Like any good literary critic reading any dense text, Philarmonus adroitly revises in Act V:

> The vision
> Which I made known to Lucius, ere the stroke
> Of yet this scarce-cold battle, at this instant
> Is full accomplish'd: for the Roman eagle,
> From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
> Lessen'd herself, and in the beams o' th' sun
> So vanish'd; which foreshadow'd our princely eagle,
> Th' imperial Caesar, should again unite
> His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,
> Which shines here in the west. (V.v.467-76)

"Unity" is always where we seek it; this soothsayer's hermeneutic dexterity is nearly farcical. Moreover, Shakespeare plays throughout with symbols such as that of the eagle, until we begin to wonder just how much (or how little) meaning one symbol can sustain. For example, the Frenchman says of Posthumus: "I have seen him in France. We had very many there could behold the sun with as firm eyes as he" (I.iv.11-13). Imogen uses a similar metaphor (to Pisanio):

> Thou shouldst have made him
> As little as a crow, or less, ere left
> To after-eye him. (I.iii.14-16)

There is a welter of metaphor in Cymbeline: figures which involve a play with signification of the sort Imogen describes here. Posthumus can indeed be made as little as a crow, and (as the soothsayer proves in his final, definitive "study" of the riddle) as big as a lion:

> Thou, Leonatus, art the lion's whelp;
> The fit and apt construction of thy name,
> Being Leo-natus doth import so much.
> [To Cymbeline.] The piece of tender air, thy virtuous daughter,
> Which we call mollis aer, and mollis aer
> We term it mulier; [to Posthumus] which mulier I divine
> Is this most constant wife, who, even now,
> Answering the letter of the oracle,

Unknown to you, unsought, were clipt about
With this most tender air. . . . (V.v.443ff.)

And so on. Leonatus, in the face of a prevailing motif, is now a lion. Through a fantastic series of etymological moves, the entire play proves the riddle, though the reverse seems as likely if not of concern to our tenacious interpreter. Whether or not this sunny new prediction of harmony is as stable as that which it supersedes remains to be seen, perhaps in Act VI. Still it is likely that any "unity", however laboriously perceived or conceived, has been diffracted in the interpretive process.

VII

"Amaz'd with matter": The Final Seen

In the final scene, the great anagnorisis, one has a sense that Cymbeline is being neatly packaged and handed to us (Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out). The scene seems driven by an irrational symmetry: the characters experience a series of perceptiv jolts as the play lurches inexorably toward a happy ending, perhaps the rebirth, renovation and rejuvenation that Frye sees in the romances. But this putative fairytale ending has its gaps and weaknesses, as Howard Felperin suggests--the scene is neatly-turned in appearance alone; I think deliberately and self-consciously so.[1] The "master problems in dramaturgy" are solved, but the methodology (the conventions and artificiality of drama, appearances, language) is drawn into question.[2]

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[1] Howard Felperin comments:

> Nothing is more remarkable in Frye's writings on earlier romance than the absence of any suggestion that this recuperation of pristine mythic shape may be incomplete or problematic and may be presented as such by the romancer himself.

"Romance and Romanticism: Some Reflections on The Tempest and Heart of Darkness, or When Is Romance No Longer Romance?" in Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered, eds. C. McGinnis Kay et al., 63.

[2] Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," 227.

The king, as the practical centre of power in the play, becomes its centre of interpretation; he, like Jupiter, would impose a story of his own (Imogen marries Cloten, Posthumus vanishes to be forgotten, etc.). Instead he puts the kingdom into a spiral of deceit and destruction. As the two gentleman observed in the opening lines:

> You do not meet a man but frowns. Our bloods
> No more obey the heavens than our courtiers'
> Still seem as does the King's. (I.i.1-3)

As the centre of the court and apex of the political pyramid, the king should be a model for all lower levels, but is not. The same power relation is evident in Cloten's anti-chastity rhetoric: "You sin against / Obedience, which you owe your father" (II.iii.111-12). To be "dutiful" in this topsy-turvy kingdom may be to subject oneself to rape; it is no wonder, therefore, that Cloten should find Cymbeline's brand of "order" to his liking. The king's attempt to freeze the kingdom into order after a paradigm of his own is rejected, for if he is the eyes, ears and head of his subjects, he is bleared, stopped and dull-witted. He seems to have no talent for assimilating and interpreting data. For example, in the case of the Queen he remarks retrospectively:

> Mine eyes
> Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;
> Mine ears, that [heard] her flattery, nor my heart,
> That thought her like her seeming. It had been vicious
> To have mistrusted her; yet, O my daughter,
> That it was folly in me, thou mayst say,
> And prove it in thy feeling. Heaven mend all! (V.v.62-8)

There is no mention here of the Queen's mind or intent; this is a king foolishly willing to trust appearances, and especially those

that play to his megalomania. Heaven perhaps will mend all, but this king and his kingdom, one suspects, would be better off with a keen intellect, for within lines the king is making the same mistake again, this time with Imogen:

> Boy,
> Thou hast look'd thyself into my grace,
> And art mine own. (V.v.93-5)

Again, though he has just vowed that such a policy is folly (and though his instinct is correct) the king is relying on appearances. This is chronic literal-mindedness, and it is apt therefore that the king becomes the focus of wildly shifting perceptions, of information overload, in the explosion of revisionary revelations that follows. But let us leave the king for a moment.

As if Shakespeare had not left himself enough time, the hermeneutic problems rapidly begin to unravel ("unfold") themselves, the puzzle arranges itself into the solution. The Queen dies a miserable, poetically just and stereotypical death, as I have remarked previously. Cornelius' account is a systematic filing away of potentially messy (that is, disruptive) dramatic red tape: she confesses (predictably) that she never loved the king, only his power (V.v.37-40); that she loathed Imogen (43-7); that she was plotting to kill the king and crown her son (49-60). The only refreshing item in the entire miserable, mechanical catalogue is the Queen's refusal to repent. Thus, like her son's, her spectre fades from the play, we can imagine the sun already beginning to emerge from behind the clouds, and so forth. And the king's defence? "Who is't can read a

woman?" (48) he says lamely, perhaps meaning that signs are unpredictable, though he persists in such single-minded interpretive practices anyway.

The Posthumus/ Imogen subplot is resolved when Posthumus strikes her. The slap brings the two people back into contact like the closing of a circuit; suddenly misery and vengeful speculation disappear. The blow is both an enactment of Posthumus' viciously sexual suspicions and the end of a kind of dream, as if Posthumus and Imogen were suddenly coming to their senses. As Pisanio cries, "O my Lord Posthumus, / You ne'er kill'd Imogen till now!" (V.v.230-1). Another microchip is in place; this solid-state play is well on its way to becoming a smoothly functioning dramaturgical marvel. And Imogen's problems are neatly capped when she discovers that her two brothers are alive:

> CYM. O Imogen,
> Thou hast lost by this a kingdom.
> IMO. No, my lord;
> I have got two worlds by't. (372-4)

Since she no longer has a claim to the throne, her marriage to Posthumus is less demeaning, though here as always the interpretations of Imogen and her father (as in the case of Lear and Cordelia) diverge: one is monetary, the other personal. I have discussed the various tellings and retellings of narratives in Cymbeline. Jachimo, while "confessing" (as one must in the final scene), glosses the play again: "Your daughter's chastity--there it begins" (V.v.179). In a manner of speaking he is correct, for the play began with a difference of definition.

The identities of Guiderius and Arviragus are unveiled at an auspicious moment, and confirmation is required in the traditional form of a birthmark:

> Guiderius had
> Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star,
> It was a mark of wonder. (V.v.363-5)

Indeed, why even require evidence? If Belarius' story is to be believed (the final scene is densely packed with such proleptic narratives) the king must have a sign. It would not do, apparently, to have two rustic impostors at lange in the court. It is noteworthy that such a mark ("a mole cinque-spotted") was used to deceive Posthumus in the first place. At any rate, the birthmark as a dramatic device is surely egregiously conventional. Anne Righter suggests that the conclusion of Cymbeline "is meant to seem playlike and contrived, the fitting conclusion to a comedy which for five acts has deliberately confounded illusion with reality."[3] The play receives a rather hasty recalibration, and all is set for the stunning finality of the closing lines.

Stunning indeed. If the "moral" of this play is, as Lucius and several others (Imogen, Belarius, Jupiter) have insisted,

> Be cheerful; wipe thine eyes:
> Some falls are means the happier to arise (IV.ii.402-3)

then we have before us a play that goes to considerable trouble to prove almost "nothing". That the final scene is extremely cumbersome on stage is evidence that Shakespeare is taking unusual risks to

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[3] Ann Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 175.

mount a great, concordant, "philharmonic" finish. For instance, Jachimo, who is ostensibly seriously wounded ("Give me leave, I faint"--149) stands witness on stage throughout most of the final scene's 485 lines of spectacle. Moreover, most of the play's dramatis personae ends up on the stage for this finale--what are they all to do, and where to stand? There are at least twelve major, and an indeterminate number of minor ("Officers, and Attendants," line 1; "other Roman prisoners guarded," line 69) characters to be arranged; most of the majors supply a segment of the narrative for which this final scene is famous. And so the scene grinds on like an assembly line, many of the characters on stage having to do something in surprise at each recognition. At the very least the Blackfriars stage would have been crowded; the variety and number of successive revelations must have been powerful. The dramaturgic stresses on the scene are unusually apparent.

The ending of this play is intricate and efficient but not euphonic: as initiated by the king, the closing series of reversals are tinged by irresponsibility, his blind materialism replaced by turgid, enthusiastic idealism. This expansive endorsement of forgiveness, for example, seems reasonable enough:

> Nobly doom'd!
> We'll learn our freshness of a son-in-law:
> Pardon's the word to all. (420-2)

But whether or not the play is affected by the Elizabethan political climate, this is a bizarre reversal of foreign policy, while the king's willingness to forget seems almost sociopathic:

> And, Caius Lucius,
> Although the victor, we submit to Caesar,
> And to the Roman empire, promising
> To pay our wonted tribute, from the which
> We were dissuaded by our wicked queen,
> Whom heavens, in justice both on her and hers,
> Have laid most heavy hand. (459-65)

Perhaps this is a precise return to the status quo (freshmen are taught that a Shakespearean play "always ends with the restoration of order"), but is not the king blissfully allowing himself to be carried away by his beneficence? I remind you of Posthumus' description of the battle that the king has just placed under erasure:

> The enemy full-hearted
> Lolling the tongue with slaught'ring--having work
> More plentiful than tools to do't--strook down
> Some mortally, some slightly touch'd, some falling
> Merely through fear, that the strait pass was damm'd
> With dead men hurt behind, and cowards living
> To die with length'ned shame. (V.iii.7-13)

Perhaps I have contracted the king's wrong-headedness, but this seems to me to be a bloody, an unforgettably "real" battle--too real to be dismissed as illusion, or simply forgotten in a moment of generosity. One has a sense in the final scene that all that has gone before is a kind of illusion, but the king now appears to be overlooking an entire war in favour of a quick and genial resolution. Philarmonus, meanwhile, is quick to add: "The fingers of the pow'rs above do tune / The harmony of this peace" (466-7). Few would disagree that the fingers of someone are meddling with this play. I suggest the digits are Shakespeare's, that he is flagrantly and self-consciously providing us with the "order" which critics so often thrust upon him. In fact, the final scene is a kind of blandishment that only partial-

ly sticks to the play--as Philip Edwards remarks in a perceptive analysis, in his early plays, "Shakespeare refuses the 'proper' ending: in the later comedies he insists on the ending above all things, but refuses the 'proper' contents."[4] To "fricasse" it, the significance of the play, one way or another, is deferred.

The final lines--Cymbeline's benediction of the play and his newly (if not arduously) forged peace--read like a jovial but rather bad joke:

> Laud we the gods,
> And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils
> From our blest altars. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Never was a war did cease
> (Ere bloody hands were wash'd) with such a peace. (476-9)

The word "sacrifice" occurs only once elsewhere in the play in I.ii.2, in the Second Lord's memorable abuse of Cloten: "you reek as a sacrifice." As the play began with a sacrifice (more or less), so it closes with one, and we have cause to wonder if the two can be differentiated. And, indeed, this play draws to a close so hurriedly that the blood remains on the hands of all those tattered and fatigued people on stage, even as Cymbeline pronounces peace. Clifford Leech writes discerningly:

> It is true that the last plays suggest a future in a way that the tragedies do not. But it is the future that the masque presents too: a banquet, and then a morning with a headache and a

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4 Edwards, p. 37.

dry tongue.[5]

Cymbeline's headache will be well deserved. In IV.iii, when the king finds that his queen is ill, Cloten missing and the Romans landed on the coast, he cries,

> Now for the counsel of my son and queen!
> I am amaz'd with matter. (27-8)

The play is very much a "maze", the king, its interpretive Theseus. The state of disarray persists, reaching a peak in the final scene when the king is overwhelmed, and asks "Does the world go round?", to which Posthumus adds the question, "How comes these staggers on me?" (232-3). Misunderstanding and questions without answers permeate Cymbeline; the world does indeed "go round", and it wavers, flickers, and defies comfortable definition (or interpretation).

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[5] Clifford Leech, "Masking and Unmasking in the Last Plays," in Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered, eds. C. McGinnis Kay, et al., 53.

Analogue

It would be fitting to end this study with nothing or, alternatively, a neat conclusion to rival the final scene of Cymbeline. Instead I offer some words on words. I am not convinced that Shakespeare is a prophet of order, or that he came to view his drama--and mimesis--with disgust; humanity cannot bear very much (certainly not that much) reality. In his use of language and the stage, Shakespeare is conscious that emptiness, whether in words or gestures, is possibility, that the circumscription of the sign excludes as well as includes. A figure will serve until it is replaced by another. One no doubt awaits the conclusion that Cymbeline systematically rends itself, but it obeys no such decorum. As Nabokov says, true art is above false honour.

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